

# **BJP vis-à-vis Hindu Resurgence**

**Koenraad Elst**

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# Introduction

Many people inside or close to the BJP, and inside or close to the broader Sangh Parivar, have become dissatisfied with what they perceive as the increasing distance between the BJP's actual policies and the Hindu expectations among the public on which the party capitalizes. To some extent, the problem lies with the BJP itself, distinguishing it from other Hindutva organizations, who then tend to blame the increasing non-Sangh element inside the BJP for this "degeneration", especially the opportunists who jumped onto the promising BJP bandwagon after the 1989 and 1991 electoral breakthroughs. To a large extent, however, the BJP problem is the RSS problem. In the BJP, the RSS approach is put to the test of day-to-day political practice, in confrontation with the enemies of Hindutva, without the benefit of the secretiveness which characterizes the functioning of other Sangh-affiliated organizations. Except for the recent defection and corruption scandals, the major failures of the BJP can be traced to RSS policies and RSS ideological conditioning.

At any rate, the problem is serious enough, even in the eyes of many BJP or RSS members, to warrant a frank debate. It is to this debate that the present paper wants to contribute. The prime focus of our attention will be the BJP's performance, but with constant reference to the RSS background. Most examples will be drawn from the one aspect of Hindutva politics which is by far the most conspicuous and the most common target of secularist criticism: the relation with Islam. Historically, the RSS was created in a context of Hindu-Muslim tension, and till today, its activists have frequently been in conflict with the Muslim community politically or even physically. An organization which has had to deal with India's Islam problem for more than 70 years may be expected to have developed a clear analysis of this problem, and an effective strategy to counter it.

Many Sangh Parivar activists are not going to like this paper. They have a childlike affection for the organization which has given them togetherness and solidarity, a feeling of purpose and of home. Often self-effacing idealists, they don't mind criticism of their own person, and they can listen to insults to India and Hinduism without being moved, but they are very touchy when it comes to criticism of the Sangh. I apologize to them for any hurt caused by this text, but I am convinced of its urgent necessity. The Sangh is benumbed by the decades-long crossfire of criticism by its enemies, but is not used to listen to criticism from friendly quarters.

On the other hand, a lot of Sangh people are going to agree with my remarks. It is partly because of complaints from Sangh activists themselves that I have resolved to formulate this critique. Little does the Sangh leadership realize that numerous idealistic volunteers have joined one of the many Sangh-affiliated organizations because they want to do something for Hinduism, not because they care about the specific Sangh outlook. The Sangh Parivar just happens to be around, just happens to be the largest organization reputed to be working for Hinduism, so Hindu-minded people join one of its fronts rather than go through the wasteful trouble of setting up their own rivalling shop; but that doesn't mean they are enthusiastic about certain Sangh fads which will come up for scrutiny in this paper.

The present text is a much-enlarged version of a two-part guest column published in the Observer of Business and Politics (Delhi) of 6 and 7 December 1996, and contributed at the suggestion of Mr. R.K. Mishra and Mr. Balbir Poonj. I thank them for their interest and for the courage of publishing that column, but of course they bear no responsibility whatsoever for its contents. Among all the Sangh people whom I should thank for giving me access to information, I want to mention Mr. K.R. Malkani and Mr. Devendra Swarup in particular. I hope they can appreciate the spirit in which I offer the comments which follow.

Koenraad Elst

Leuven, 17 January 1997

# 1. Anything but a "Hindu" party

The strange thing about the BJP is that its voters consider it a Hindu party, its enemies denounce it as a Hindu party, but the party will call itself anything except a Hindu party.

Unlike most critics of the BJP, who tend to make their point by quoting sources openly hostile to the party, we should prove our case by going to its own formulations of its ideology. To summarize the ideological positions of the BJP and its former avatar, the BJS (Bharatiya Jana Sangh), from authentic sources, we will reproduce the brief professions of ideological commitment given in the Constitutions of the BJS (1973) and of the BJP (1992). The summary given in the BJS Constitution under the heading "Aims and Objectives in Brief", a programme to which all BJS party members pledged their loyalty, are as follows (we give it in its entirety, but change the order so as to group the different points under headings of our own making):

1) Cultural nationalism: "Political, social and economic reconstruction of the country on the basis of Bharatiya Sanskriti [= culture] and Maryada [= "limit", ethics]. Protection and promotion of the cow. Use of Hindi and other Pradeshic [= provincial] languages as official languages in their regions. Changes in the judicial system to suit the genius of India and fit in with present-day conditions."

2) Political nationalism: "The establishment of a unitary government and decentralisation of political and economic power. Establishment of Akhand Bharat [= undivided India including the Pakistani and Bangladeshi territories]. Complete integration of Kashmir. Liberation of territory occupied by China and Pakistan. A foreign policy based upon enlightened self-interests of the country. Modern-most military armaments."

3) Social concerns: "Protection of the fundamental rights of the individual and the promotion of interests of the Society. Guarantee of the fundamental right to work and livelihood. Upholding establishment and protection of the tiller's right to ownership of land. Ceiling on agricultural land and redistribution of land. Eradication of untouchability. Elimination of corruption. Free education up to middle class. Facilities for medical care and social security."

4) Economic programme: "Encouragement to small mechanised and rural industries. Nationalisation of basic industries. Curbing monopolistic tendencies in the economic sphere. Determination of minimum and maximum expendable income. Worker's participation in the profit and management of the industries. Stabilisation of prices. [1]

Under headings 1 and 2 we certainly find a nationalist programme, considerably more radical than anything stated by the later BJP. Under headings 3 and 4, we do not find the "rightist" policies which the leftists always attribute to the Hindutva forces, but a typical social-democratic programme. But either way, what we do not find, is an explicitly Hindu orientation underlying this

programme. One may argue that in its practical application, Hindu social philosophy boils down to an "integral humanism" of which this programme is the logical explicitation; but even then, there should be no reason to be so modest (not to say secretive) about the Hindu source of this orientation.

The BJP defines its ideology as follows:

"Article II: Objective. The party is pledged to build up India as a strong and prosperous nation, which is modern, progressive and enlightened in outlook and which proudly draws inspiration from India's ancient culture and values and thus is able to emerge as great world power playing an effective role in the comity of Nations for the establishment of world peace and a just international order.

"The party aims at establishing a democratic state which guarantees to all citizens irrespective of caste, creed or sex, political, social and economic justice, equality of opportunity and liberty of faith and expression.

"The party shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by law established and to the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy and would uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.

"Article III: Basic Philosophy. Integral Humanism shall be the basic philosophy of the Party.

"Article IV: Commitments. The Party shall be committed to nationalism and national integration, democracy, Gandhian Socialism, Positive Secularism, that is 'Sarva Dharma Samabhav', and value-based politics. The party stands for decentralisation of economic and political power." [2]

Upon joining the party, every BJP member makes the following pledge:

"I believe in Integral Humanism which is the basic philosophy of Bharatiya Janata Party.

"I am committed to Nationalism and National Integration, Democracy, Gandhian Socialism, Positive Secularism (Sarva Dharma Samabhava) and value-based politics.

"I subscribe to the concept of a Secular State and Nation not based on religion.

"I firmly believe that this task can be achieved by peaceful means alone.

"I do not observe or recognize untouchability in any shape or form.

"I am not a member of any other political party.

"I undertake to abide by the Constitution, Rules and Discipline of the Party." [3]

I have taken the trouble of quoting the BJP's explicit statement of its political objectives and methods in full, because these official self-declarations and the received wisdom about the BJP are miles apart. These statements can be used as counter-evidence by those who are concerned about the slanderous descriptions of the BJP as "Hindu fundamentalists" standing for "preservation of caste oppression", for a "theocratic state", for "communal violence", if not for "fascism". However, while comforting for those who try to prove that the BJP is a nice secularist party, the cited official statements of the BJP party-line are somewhat worrying from a Hindu viewpoint. Indeed, the word "Hindu" does not figure in them at any point.

Moreover, like in the Indian Constitution, there is nothing typically Hindu about these BJS/BJP programmes. The BJS text still contained some Sanskrit words which could have been replaced with English terms without loss of meaning, but the operative term is Bharatiya, "Indian"; the BJP can do without the Sanskrit altogether (except for one problematic expression, cfr. *infra*). These manifestoes are entirely in the tradition of Western liberal-democratic nationalism, and most of the expressions used can be found in texts of the American and French Revolutions or the speeches of 19th-century liberal nationalists like Lajos Kossuth or Giuseppe Mazzini. Not that this is objectionable in itself, but from a party claiming "Bharatiya culture" as its inspiration, this wholesale borrowing from the West is not very promising.

The term integral humanism, the BJP's official ideology, was introduced in Sangh ideology by Deendayal Upadhyaya, as a social doctrine based on Hindu instead of Western thought. It was given a universalist rather than a "national" name, which in principle I consider a good thing; "Western" ideologies like liberalism and socialism have not been labelled after their country of origin either. At the same time, a nagging suspicion remains that the term was chosen and promoted as yet another attempt to acquire a "secular" identity.

[1] Reproduced in Bharatiya Jana Sangh Party Documents 1951-1972, vol.1, p.222.

[2] Constitution and Rules (as amended by the National Council at Gandhinagar, Gujarat, on 2nd May 1992) of the Bharatiya Janata Party, p.3-4. "Sarva-Dharma-Samabhava" is a Gandhian slogan meaning "equal respect for all religions".

[3] Constitution and Rules, p.19.



## 2. "Equal respect for all religions"

The only explicitly Indian contribution in the cited BJS/BJP self-declarations is of doubtful value: "positive secularism" defined as "sarva-dharma-samabhava", "equal respect for all religions". We let the difference with the original European concept of secularism (equal indifference towards all religions, equal independence from all religions) pass, and focus on the problematic meaning of the slogan defining this "positive secularism". Two meanings are attested: the political meaning apparently given to it in the cited BJP texts, viz. that the state must be equidistant from Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and any other religion; and the religious meaning given to it by Mahatma Gandhi and his followers, viz. that a religious person should have equal respect for Hinduism, Islam etc., because all these religions are equally good and satisfying.

The Gandhians and the travelling neo-Hindu sadhus have spread the notion that Hinduism itself holds all religions in equal esteem, even that it considers all religions to be equally true. This claim is repeated with enthusiasm in anti-Hindutva polemic by secularists who try to delegitimize Hindu self-defence in the name of some suicidal masochism advertised as "genuine Hinduism". However, the truth is that this Gandhian slogan is a typical product of the political tangles of the colonial age and of syncretistic Theosophy-influenced neo-Hinduism; it is not an ancient Hindu dictum capturing the true spirit of Hinduism. Possibly Gandhi meant the slogan to be a trick to domesticate Christianity and Islam into the age-old system of Hindu pluralism: if Hindus treat Islam and Christianity as "equal" to their own cherished traditions, Muslims and Christians will reciprocate this rhetoric and give up their open intention to replace Hinduism with their own beliefs. The results of Gandhi's policies, viz. Partition and an intensification of Christian missionary subversion, already indicates how wrong-headed the well-intended slogan really is.

Of course, Hindu tradition has always been wholeheartedly pluralistic. It cherishes a principle of modesty in judgment, aware of the limitations of each human viewpoint. It respects the urge to seek the truth which alights in every soul. It recognizes its own attitude when it sees a reverence for the sacred at work in other societies. It has compassion for the limitations of the human intellect, which in most people never outgrows the conditioning of education and culture (how many people who deride a given doctrine or practice would have arrived at the same judgment if they had been born in a community upholding this doctrine or practice?). For this reason, Hinduism practises tolerance vis-à-vis all religious doctrines and practices, even obviously wrong ones, as long as they don't interfere with those of others. History shows that Hinduism practises equal tolerance towards all sects of Hindu provenance, and towards Zoroastrianism, Judaism and pre-colonial Syrian-Christianity which, at least in India, have always abided by the rules of Hindu pluralism: live and let live. This tolerance becomes questionable and indicative of a lack of viveka/discrimination when one is dealing with religions which refuse to abide by the rules.

Hinduism applauds diversity and consequently accepts that people of different temperaments, circumstances and levels of understanding develop different viewpoints and different forms to express even the same viewpoint. In that sense, it has always paid equal respect to shramanas and

brahmanas, to jnana and bhakti, etc. It showed samabhava to all traditions which counted as dharma. This respect was never due to adharma practices and doctrines such as Christianity and Islam, the religions for whose benefit the slogan is used mostly.

The fundamental mistake of Indian secularism is that Hinduism is put in the same category as Islam and Christianity. The definition of "religion" which is implied when we call Islam and Christianity religions, may well not apply to Hinduism, and vice versa. Islam and Christianity are defined, by believers as well as by informed outsiders, as belief systems; Hinduism is not so defined (except by incompetent outsiders and some of their neo-Hindu imitators who try to cast Hinduism into the mould of Christianity). Islam's and Christianity's intrinsic irrationality and hostility to independent critical thought warranted secularism as a kind of containment policy. By contrast, Hinduism recognizes freedom of thought and does not need to be contained by secularism. The contents of this last sentence, meaning the radical difference in kind of Hinduism and its enemies, can be found in many Hindutva publications (e.g., lamely, "Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life", or apologetically, "Hindus cannot be fundamentalists"), and yet the same Hindutva spokesmen parrot a Gandhian slogan which treats both Hinduism and its enemies as equal members of the set of "religions" or "dharmas".

Historically, Hindus have quickly recognized Islam and missionary Christianity as mleccha, barbaric predatory religions, not as instances of dharma to which any (not to speak of "equal") respect is due. Until Swami Dayananda Saraswati, they didn't even consider these religions as worthy of a detailed critique. Once this critique was finally made, it was quickly proven that Christianity and Islam are not "equally true" with Hinduism, whether with the help of modern rationalist scholarship or from the viewpoint of Hindu spirituality (cfr. *infra*).

Far from paying equal respect to just any movement whether dharmic or not, Hinduism does not even require equal respect for each of its genuine dharmas. Toleration does not imply equal respect for the insights and values taught by the sects concerned; it is an application of the true ahimsa spirit, viz. accepting the right of existing entities including ethnic identities and religious traditions to continue their existence. But this doesn't mean that Hinduism considers all doctrines and practices as of equal value. Hinduism as a whole gives a place in the sun to all, but it does not want any individual to set aside his criticisms of certain viewpoints or his personal preferences for some and aversion for other religious practices. It never was anti-logical nor anti-realistic; therefore, it never required people to muzzle both their rational faculty and their temperamental inclinations. These criticisms and preferences are perfectly normal, and there is no need to suppress them with an enforced "equal respect". Even within the Hindu fold, there is no question of equality between different traditions and viewpoints.

One Hindu philosopher may disagree with another, i.e. consider his own view right and the other's wrong; indeed, debates between different schools of Hindu thought have mostly taken the logically necessary form of demonstrating the truth of one and the consequent untruth of the opposing viewpoint. Calling one view true and another untrue is not what I would call equal respect, even though there may be equal respect for the human beings defending the respective views. Like a good moderator in a public debate, Hinduism allows both sides their say, but it is not required to

believe that both are equally right. Similarly, though Hindu society has both a class of married priests and a class of celibate renunciates, there have always been people upholding the one institution and arguing against the other, e.g. that full-time monkhood is a parasitic way of life, or conversely, that the great spiritual achievement happens to require full-time dedication and thereby excludes social and family duties. Hindu tradition as such refuses to be pinned down to one side of the argument, but every Hindu is entitled to choose sides and prefer one dharma over another.

Apart from this subjective inequality of dharmas which Hinduism allows its adherents, there are universal judgments on which the whole society has developed a broad consensus, and which label one practice as right and another as wrong, or at least as inferior. Thus, a contemporary ritualist who sacrifices flowers and fruits condemns the animal sacrifice practised by his forebears, and still by some shaktic sects, as primitive and unnecessarily cruel. There was a time when Vedic seers practised animal sacrifice, and though Hindus still hold the Vedic seers in great esteem, the Hindu mainstream has outgrown this bloody practice: there is no equal respect for the old, primitive practice and for the new, more enlightened practice (as is illustrated by the clumsy attempts to prove that the descriptions of Vedic seers sacrificing goats or eating beef, or of the Buddha eating pork, are mere metaphors). The Vedic seers were Hindus alright, the shaktic priests and sorcerers are Hindus alright, their rituals are part of Sanatana Dharma alright, yet their slaughterhouse dharma is not considered worthy of equal respect with more refined innovations in ritual.

Similarly, even most meat-eating Hindus agree that vegetarianism is superior, deserving of greater respect. Another pan-Hindu consensus pertinent to the present discussion is the rejection of the narrow-minded exclusivist sects which refuse to abide by the rules of pluralism. Before the Hindu mind got confused with sarva-dharma-samabhava, this meant a spontaneous abhorrence of the destructive fanaticism of Christianity and Islam.

Within broad limits, the Hindu tradition as a whole does not pronounce on the existing differences, leaving it to the Hindu people to make a choice between its own variety of options. Given each individual man's limitations, it is wise not to identify with one man's beliefs and preferences (as Islam does) and give room to different and even opposing positions. All the same, Sanatana Dharma leaves its adherents entirely free to prefer one option over another, and even to criticize and reject certain options. So, even within the spectrum of Hindu schools and sects, there is no question of sarva-dharma-samabhava, merely of peaceful co-existence. The few cases of violent rioting between Shaiva and Vaishnava monks (gleefully played up and magnified in malafide pieces on "the myth of Hindu tolerance") may be considered as trespasses against the spirit of Hinduism, but debates and denunciations of certain views and practices remain entirely within the rules of Hindu pluralism.

Moreover, the same rational objection against sarva-dharma-samabhava which applies to intra-Hindu debates, applies to the relation between Islam or Christianity and Hinduism, or even to that between Islam and Christianity. According to Christianity, Jesus was the divine Saviour and Mohammed was nobody; according to Islam, Jesus was just a human prophet and Mohammed was the final prophet. These doctrines are mutually exclusive and cannot both be right. They can be equally wrong (actually, they are) and hence deserving of equal scepticism, but it is impossible for

both to be right and deserving of equal respect.

The slogan *sarva-dharma-samabhava* (not to mention the plain buffoonery of the "equal truth of all religions" propagated by Bhagwan Das and the latter-day Ramakrishna Mission) is a cheap but all too transparent way of solving doctrinal contradictions, viz. by dogmatically decreeing that they are non-existent or at least irrelevant.[1] It is incredibly pretentious, firstly by falsely implying that one knows all religions (how can you pronounce on things which you don't know?), and secondly by overruling the laws of logic, viz. by positing the equivalence of mutually contradictory doctrines. In practice, it also implies a refusal to hear the representatives of the religions concerned, esp. when they explain why rival doctrines (including the whole spectrum of Hinduism) are unacceptable to them. Finally, while the slogan is rather harmless when applied to rival schools of Hinduism, it becomes very dangerous when (as mostly) it is applied to viper religions with an explicit programme of annihilating Hinduism. Hindu activists should think again about this slogan, then drop it.

Instead, however, they have decided to make things worse: the RSS-affiliated trade-union, *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*, has taken the initiative of founding a *Sarva Panth Samadar Manch* (Equal Respect for All Sects Front), on 16 April 1994. The function where this new platform was created, was presided over by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, who counts as the Sangh's model Muslim (cfr. *infra*). The problem is not that contact is made with Muslims. Muslims are as good human beings as Hindus on average, and every effort should be made to break through the intrinsic separatism of Islam, which teaches its followers that there are two separate mankind: the Muslims to whom both bliss in heaven and rulership on earth have been promised, and the unbelievers, doomed to subservience in this world and eternal hellfire in the next. Indeed, one of the wellsprings of the RSS desire to reach out to the Muslims was the experience of cordial co-operation with *Jamaat-e-Islami* activists during the Emergency, as BMS founder-president Dattopant Thengadi told me. Soon after coming out of jail in 1977, K. R. Malkani told Sita Ram Goel that he had an opportunity to learn true Islam from the *Jamaat-i-Islami* co-prisoners. When Goel asked him as to how he could judge the statements of these spokesmen for Islam when he himself had not studied the subject, Malkani dismissed the doubt raised with a disdainful smile.

The problem is that these outreach operations invariably imply flattery of Islam. The day a unit of any Sangh Parivar organization includes even a single Muslim, its capacity to talk freely about Islam disappears. Instead of freeing the Muslims from their medieval doctrinal conditioning called Islam, this approach only serves to confirm them in their thrall to Mohammed and his belief system. Bringing the alienated Muslims into the national mainstream without loosening their ties to Mohammed was Mahatma Gandhi's full-time occupation, yet he failed dismally. There is no sign at all that the RSS has a better and more clever approach which could spare it the same humiliating defeat at the hands of unregenerate Islamic separatism.

A must reading about this is Harsh Narain: *Myth of Composite Culture and Equality of Religions*, Voice of India 1991.

# 3. What is Wrong with "Hindu"?

To an extent, the avoidance of the term "Hindu" has characterized many earlier avatars of Hindu nationalism. Sri Aurobindo titled his newspaper "Arya", and declared that India would rise with "Sanatana Dharma", a more profound term than the colloquial "Hinduism". The Arya Samaj preferred the term "Vedic", or the Vedic term "Arya" (denoting adherence to Vedic civilizational standards), to the originally purely geographical Persian term "Hindu". Moreover, "Hindu" was a catch-all term which included traditions considered deviant or non-Vedic by the Arya Samaj (esp. Puranic, Tantric); in the 1881 census, the Arya Samaj even advised its members to register as non-Hindus. This policy was reversed for the 1901 census, but in the 1980s, some Arya Samaj factions again made attempts to be recognized as a non-Hindu minority. By then, the term "Hindu" had not only become a distinctly dirty word, but also carried constitutional disadvantages with it (cfr. *infra*). In the same period, and for the same conformist and opportunist reasons, the Ramakrishna Mission unsuccessfully tried to get registered as a new non-Hindu religion called Ramakrishnaism.

Even those who espouse doctrines and practices which are described in handbooks on "Hinduism", avoid the term "Hindu". In recent years, yoga teachers whether Indian or Western have tended to avoid mentioning the purely "Hindu" character of what they offer as the universal "science of yoga" (it is Christian fundamentalists who warn people of the Satanic Hindu character of these seemingly innocuous breathing and mental exercises). The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi calls his sadhana "science of creative intelligence", the political party which his followers in the West founded is called "Natural Law Party", and its viewpoints are typically prefixed with "Vedic": Vedic economics, Vedic health programme, etc. One of the reasons certainly is that outside India, the term "Hindu" is exotic and therefore connotes irrelevance to local situations. Another, more ominous one is that ever since the arrival of Hare Krishna singers in our streets, "Hindu" at best connotes mildly laughable eccentricity if not charlatanism.[1] For people who get their news and views through Christian missionary information channels, "Hindu" connotes savage superstition, otherworldliness, indolence, oppression and cruelty. But these reasons cannot count as valid excuses for activists with pro-Hindu convictions working within Hindu society.

The most decent reason for avoiding the term "Hindu" might be that the corpus of Hindu literature itself does not mention it anywhere. It is, after all, a Persian term brought to India by the Muslim invaders. Moreover, it has a negative definition: any Indian who does not subscribe to a prophetic-monotheist creed. It is merely the "Other" of the Muslim invaders in India. But then, it had the advantage of uniting all Indians of different traditions and levels of culture in a single category clearly demarcated from the predator religions Christianity and Islam. This gave the term also a positive content, viz. their common civilizational virtues which set them apart from Christianity and Islam: their pluralism, their freedom of thought, their reliance on genuine experience rather than dogmatic belief. "Hindu" has therefore become a meaningful, more than merely geographical term. Though in certain contexts a puristic preference for more ancient and native terms may be legitimate, the term "Hindu" should be good enough for household use in the present era. Therefore, when Hindu freedom fighters created a common platform to counter the anti-national

designs of the Muslim League, they did not hesitate to call it Hindu Mahasabha (HMS). The first session of the All Indian Hindu Mahasabha was held at Haridwar in 1915 and was attended, among others, by Gandhi who had not yet taken command of the Indian National Congress or become known as Mahatma. This, then, is the main exception to the rule that modern Hindu ideologues and organizations shun the name "Hindu". Later on HMS ideologue V.D. Savarkar gave currency to the neologism "Hindutva" (a somewhat uneasy combination of a Persian loan-word with a high-brow Sanskritic suffix) through his so-titled book in 1923. He too tried to give a positive meaning to the term "Hindu", and sought it in people's degree of rootedness in the Indian territory: a Hindu is one for whom India is both "fatherland" and "holyland".

But barely two years later, Dr. Hedgewar, though acknowledging Savarkar's influence, called his newly created organization "Rashtriya" (national, not "Hindu") Swayamsevak Sangh. By that time, Gandhi had made the word Hindu to mean something less than 'national', and the nation had become something more than Hindu.. The revolutionary movement in Bengal with which Hedgewar had come in contact was also turning away from its Hindu inspiration and fighting shy of the word 'Hindu' in order to lull Muslim suspicions. The name Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh has recently been adopted by the Non-Resident Indian branches of the RSS (in whose case "national" would mean "Trinidadian", "Canadian" etc.), but for the rest, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP, founded in 1964) is the only explicitly "Hindu" RSS affiliate, all others being "Rashtriya" or "Bharatiya". These terms, in contrast to "Arya" or "Vedic" or "Sanatana Dharma" (which are not used in the quoted BJS and BJP programmes either), are not synonyms of "Hinduism", but purely geographical terms.

The explanation given by RSS men is that in Hedgewar's view, the nation of India was essentially Hindu, and that the self-designation "Hindu" would merely corroborate the prevalent British (and later, Nehruvian) demotion of the Hindus as merely one "community" among others, rather than as the nation of India.[2] The version of the RSS's critics in the Hindu Mahasabha was and is that the RSS was just not brave enough to affirm its natural Hindu identity against the anti-Hindu dictates of the opinion-making establishment. It should be admitted that the tendency to identify "Hindu" with "national" was already present in Savarkar's own definition, but the component "India as holyland" does at least discriminate between traditions originating in India and the predatory religions Christianity and Islam.

Among the Sangh Parivar's components, the BJP is the most emphatic in avoiding any association with Hinduism. While other organizations somehow affiliated with the RSS may sometimes describe their political ideal as "Hindu Rashtra", the BJP studiously avoids such terms and prefers to swear by "genuine secularism". When A.B. Vajpayee is asked about the notion of "Hindu Rashtra", he declares he prefers "Bharatiya Rashtra", which, if words still have any meaning, can only denote the already-existing "Indian state", not an ideal requiring the efforts of a "Bharatiya" political party. American NRIs told me that when Vajpayee was invited to preside over the opening of a new Hindu temple in the USA, he said that they should have called it a "Bharatiya temple" instead.

L.K. Advani has correctly pointed out that "the term Hindu Rashtra was never used during the Jana Sangh days, neither had it ever been mentioned in any manifesto of the BJP". At the same time, he

reiterated the RSS theory that any Indian who "identifies with India" is thereby a Hindu: a Muslim who satisfies this condition (what Gandhians called a "nationalist Muslim") should call himself a "Mohammedi Hindu", a Christian should likewise be described as a "Christi Hindu". In Advani's view, "those residing in the country are Hindus even if many of them believe in different religions.(...) those following Islam are 'Mohammedi Hindus'. Likewise, Christians living in the country are 'Christian Hindus', while Sikhs are termed 'Sikh Hindus'. The respective identities are not undermined by such a formulation. Similarly, someone is a 'Sanatani Hindu', while the other is an 'Arya Samaji Hindu'. It would be better if such a formulation comes to be accepted. As part of the same concept, I consider this country to be a Hindu 'rashtra'. There is no need to convert it into a Hindu 'rashtra'; this needs to be understood. But I certainly do not believe in forcing people to believe in this."[3]

In theory, and at first sight, this construction could be intellectually defensible if we start from the Hindu doctrine of the ishta devata, the "chosen deity": every Hindu has a right to worship the deity or divine incarnation or guru whom he chooses, and this may include exotic characters like Allah or Jesus Christ. In practice, however, anyone can feel that something isn't right with this semantic manipulation: Muslims and Christians abhor and mock the idea of being defined as sects within Hinduism, and apart from a handful of multiculturalist Christians who call themselves "both Hindu and Christian", this co-optation of Muslims and Christians into the Hindu fold has no takers. It is actually resented, rejected and ridiculed. After all, taken to its logical extreme, it would imply that the state of Pakistan, founded by and for Indian Muslims, i.e. "Mohammedi Hindus", is also a Hindu Rashtra.

More than the nationalist definition of Hindu-ness developed by Savarkar (who admitted that including Muslim in his definition of "Hindu" would stretch it too far), the clumsy notion of "Mohammedi Hindus" brandished by the RSS-BJP is an element of an attempt to delink the term Hinduism from its natural religious contents.[4] This broad concept of Hinduism implies the assumption that Indian Muslims can still, in a way, be Hindus, as expressed by token BJP Muslims who say things like: "When my ancestors accepted Islam, that didn't mean we changed our culture." That remains to be seen: a practicing Muslim is expected to condemn Hindu idolatry and polytheism, to have an Arabic name, to observe an Arab-originated dress code, distinct marriage customs, food habits, and rituals of which to Hindus some are absurd (circumcision) and others repugnant (animal sacrifice, abolished in Vedic ritual millennia ago). Adding separate traditions of Muslim architecture, Persian-Arabic vocabulary, poetry, script and music, it is clear that in practice, Muslim culture in India, though differing in certain externals from Muslim culture elsewhere, is most certainly a different culture from that of the Hindus; in making that very observation during his pro-Partition speeches, Jinnah was simply right. In spite of this, Hindutva people insist that an "Indianized" Islam can be integrated into a Hindu nationhood.

Some go even further and accept Indian Muslims within the ambit of Hindutva without any questions asked. Thus, veteran journalist M.V. Kamath writes in the Organiser: "Hindutva, then, is what is common to all of us, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists... whoever has Indian heritage. Hindutva is the engine that pulls the nation and takes us into the future. It is cultural nationalism that has the power to unite.(...) Hindutva is not Hinduism, it does not ask

anyone to follow a particular creed or ritual. Indeed, it does not speak for Hinduism, it is not a religious doctrine." [5] This way, the opposition between "Indian secular nationalism" and "Hindu communalism" is declared non-existent, essentially by replacing the latter position with the former: Kamath's conception of Hindutva is fully coterminous with Nehru's purely territorial patriotism. But in that case, what is all the fuss about? If the Hindutva activists are merely Indian nationalists, why don't they applaud Nehru and join the secularists? This is one more of those occasions where Hindutva spokesmen assert something (i.e. the equivalence of Hindutva and secular nationalism) to their own satisfaction, but fail to notice that they are convincing no one, that on the contrary everybody derides the exercise as a cheap semantic trick, a transparent attempt to sweep profound antagonisms between religions, or between Nehruvian secularism and Hindutva, under the carpet.

While we could live with redefinitions of the term Hindutva, which is still a neologism, there is just no excuse when Hindutva ideologues go as far as to "secularize" the meaning of the established term Hindu. Consider the following dialogues, one true and one imaginary, cited by an RSS stalwart as evidence that "Hindu" simply means "Indian":

1. "When the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid of Delhi went to Mecca on a pilgrimage, a local resident asked him, 'Are you a Hindu?' The Imam was startled by this question and replied, 'No, I am a Muslim.' When Imam Saheb asked him the reason for calling him a Hindu, he replied that all 'Hindustanis' were called Hindu there." [6]

2. "A Frenchman asked an Indian, 'What is your religion?' The reply was, 'Hindu.' The Frenchman countered: 'That is your nationality; but what is your religion?'" [7]

This exercise of sanitizing the term "Hindu" from its religio-cultural contents is extremely silly. What is the use of learning that some ignorant foreigners call the Shahi Imam a Hindu, when you yourself know for fact that the man is an enemy of Hinduism? And what word shall we invent to designate the phenomenon which all encyclopedias commonly call "Hinduism", once we have imposed on the word "Hindu" the geographical-political meaning which is already satisfactorily expressed by the words "Indian" and "Hindustani"? What is gained if the expression "Hindu-Muslim riot" becomes replaceable with "Indian-Muslim riot"? Or if the phrase "Hindus dominate Nepal" turns out to mean "Indians dominate Nepal"? The people of Nepal, the only Hindu Rashtra so far, might not like it. Short, this semantic manipulation is as hopelessly transparent as a child's very first lie. Moreover, it would imply that "Hindu Rashtra", the professed goal of this Sangh leader, simply means "Indian state"; and this in turn would imply that the Hindutva movement is a bunch of buffoons working for the creation of a state which has already been created long ago. [8] If the word "Hindu" can only be used after distorting its meaning, it is perhaps just as well that the BJP avoids using it.

Most RSS affiliates pledge allegiance to secularism, but they at least do so by emphasizing the "secular" (meaning pluralistic) character of Hinduism, as in the VHP ad campaign: "Hindu India, secular India". So, if Hinduism is secular, why not openly acknowledge the Hindu inspiration of the BJP's "positive secularism"? Well, a new argument against an explicitation of the BJP's Hindu orientation was created by a 1992 court decision under the Representation of the People Act,



prohibiting the Hindu Mahasabha from contesting elections. The reasons given by the judges were that the HMS openly aims at founding a Hindu state and that being a Hindu (though defined very inclusively) is a requirement for membership, as per Art.3 and Art.5.A of the HMS constitution. In several cases, moreover, elected candidates for the BJP or the Shiv Sena have been taken to court for "corrupt electoral practices", meaning the "use" of religion in their campaigns; some of them won their cases, some of them lost, but the danger inherent in openly identifying with the Hindu cause was certainly driven home.

After the Ayodhya demolition, the Congress government threatened to outlaw the BJP on similar grounds, but several socialist and casteist parties, the BJP's erstwhile allies in the struggle against the Emergency, refused to support the necessary legislative reform because they remembered all too well how small the distance is between such rhetoric of "protecting democracy against the communal forces" and the imposition of dictatorship. The BJP calculates that it was lucky this time around (and the next time, viz. the Supreme Court verdict that an appeal to "Hindutva" is not a corrupt electoral practice), but that on a future occasion, any sign of espousal of a "Hindu" agenda may be fatal. Instead of questioning the tendency to outlaw religion as a legitimate factor in political choices of Indian citizens, the BJP bends over backwards to adapt to it.

In Europe, with its centuries of struggle against Christian hegemony, nobody minds that the ruling party in Germany is called Christlich-Demokratische Union, "Christian-Democratic Union".[9] Democracy allows the citizens to decide for themselves on what basis to form political parties, so they exercise the right to found a party committed to "Christian values", and to vote it to power. Most Christian-Democratic parties nowadays hasten to add that these "Christian values" have become a "common European heritage shared by non-Christians as well". But in India, any hint of a "Hindu" party upholding "Hindu values" (even if explained as a "common Indian heritage shared by the minorities as well") is declared intolerable by judges and journalists,-- and by the leaders of the very party concerned.

"Charlatanism" is the common allegation against traveling babas who promise instant enlightenment by means of a simple technique; it certainly applies when they offer another magic trick, viz. instant harmony between Hindus and Muslims by means of the "equality of religions" (or Ram Rahim ek hai, or Ishwar Allah tere naam, etc.) mantra.

[2] Thus, M.S. Golwalkar: Bunch of Thoughts (Jagaran Prakashan, Bangalore 1980 (1966)), p.177-178.

[3] "Advani wants Muslims to identify with 'Hindutva'", Times of India, 30/1/1995.

[4] To support this non-doctrinal, non-communal usage of the term Hindu, K.S. Sudarshan relates some anecdotes where Arabs and Frenchmen refer to any Indian (including the Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid when he visited Arabia) as a "Hindu". A linguist would say that in that case, the word Hindu is a "false friend": though sounding the same, it has a different meaning in Arabic on the one and English or Hindi on the other hand. This is obviously no sound basis for denying the operative (and historical, and legal) meaning of Hindu as "any Indian except Muslims, Christians and Parsis".

[5] M.V. Kamath: "The Essence of Hindutva", *Organiser*, 28 April 1996. If "Indian heritage" is the unifying element, the point is precisely that Muslims and Christians reject this heritage.

[6] Adapted from *Saptahik Hindustan*, 1 May 1977, in K.S. Sudarshan et al.: *Why Hindu Rashtra?* (Suruchi Prakashan, Delhi 1990), p.5.

[7] *Ibid.*; the story is an anachronism, for by now the French distinguish clearly between *indien* (pertaining to the Indian territory or state) and *hindou* (pertaining to Hindu religion).

[8] We forego the occasion to enter the discussion on the exact meaning of the word *Rashtra*, simply because it is so obvious: the word can be analyzed as "instrument (-tra) of rulership (raj)", hence "the institution through which government is exercised", hence "state"; and not "nation" (as some RSS stalwarts insist on asserting), the subject for whose benefit this political instrument is created. Even if the latter meaning is accepted, the "Hindu *Rashtra*" is an entity which (especially according to Sangh ideologues) has been in existence for ages, viz. the Hindu nation.

[9] A Gandhian secularist remarked about this comparison that "Christian-Democratic" refers to a well-defined "Christian" identity, and that there is no Indian equivalent to this, since "Hinduism" is but an undefined conglomerate. In fact, when the German Christian-Democratic Union was founded, fifty years ago, Protestants and Catholics were still mutually hostile religions, and it was something of a revolution to create a joint political platform representing the values they held in common. A fortiori, the different "Hindu" traditions (which do not have a history of religious wars against one another, as Catholicism and Protestantism do) can quite legitimately be united for political purposes on a common platform.

## 4. The BJP flag

A "Hindu" or non-Hindu party name would matter little if the policies behind it would be the right ones, but as we shall demonstrate, the avoidance of a Hindu self-designation goes hand in hand with the avoidance of certain pressing Hindu concerns in the party's policies. While we are discussing the party's self-presentation, we may add to our doubts about the chosen name, the question of the party's flag. Many party workers are embarrassed with the green-saffron flag, and I want to give a voice to their misgivings.

When the BJP was founded, a new flag was devised: "two vertical colours, saffron and green, in the ratio of 2:1, with the election symbol of the Party [lotus flower] in blue colour in the middle of the saffron portion equal to half its size. The green portion will be near the mast." [1] Why the green part? When questioned, more than one BJP spokesman will try to conceal the simple truth, e.g. by arguing that this was the flag of the unified Janata Party of 1977-79, of which the new BJP had claimed the heritage. [2] In reality, the Janata Party had its colours in vertical instead of horizontal juxtaposition, and no lotus flower, so the BJP flag was definitely a newly designed flag.

The Hindu Mahasabha flag was and is saffron, adorned with several Hindu symbols. Shivaji's flag was plain saffron and is still used by the Shiv Sena as well as by the RSS. The old Jan Sangh flag was saffron, adorned only with a lamp. Whatever else may be said of these organizations, they have pledged allegiance to Hinduism at least at the level of visual symbolism. Of course, this colour does not necessarily imply a bold commitment to Hinduism: when challenged by secularists about this shameless expression of Hindu inspiration, Hindutva spokesmen so inclined can always wriggle out by saying that the saffron flag is just a conventional symbol, a historical remnant, in fact the original pre-Independence Congress choice as the secular national flag, or some such disclaimer. Yet, upon being constituted as a new party in 1980, the BJP chose to betray even that merely symbolic link with Hinduism.

The BJP's flag, like the Congress and Republic flags, is one-third green. The green was added as the symbol of Islam as a permanent declaration that the new party was Muslim-friendly. This is a more extreme case of Muslim appeasement than the inclusion of green in the national flag.

Firstly, as a classical tricolour scheme, the Indian flag, unlike the BJP flag, may be read as just another instance of the traditional Indo-European scheme of three qualities (triguna) found in most tricolour flags: white as representing the serene (sattvika) quality, saffron or red for the energetic (rajasika) quality, and a dark colour for the material (tamasika) quality. The dark colour can vary between different Indo-European cultures, and may be black, brown, blue or even green; in which case, green has a natural non-communal symbol value in a Vedic cosmological scheme. This way, the Congress/Republic flag at least satisfies certain patterns of universal symbolism; by contrast, the imposition of a green part on the BJP flag admits of no interpretation except as a kow-tow to Islam.

In a future post-communal era, the said triguna symbolism may become the official explanation of

the Republic flag's colour division, but its historical genesis was of course communal: during the Hindu-Muslim bhai-bhai era of Congress collaboration with the (intrinsically anti-national) Khilafat agitation, Muslim militants and their Hindu sympathizers inside the Congress insisted on including green, conventionally the emblematic colour of the desert religion, Islam. The Congress Flag Committee (1931) proposed the plain saffron flag (with blue charkha) as a historically rooted, truly national flag for independent India.[3] Disregarding the Committee's advice, the Congress leadership opted once more for the tricolour scheme which was commonly understood to signify a pledge of allegiance to both Hinduism and Islam. But then, secondly, the Indian National Congress had at least the excuse of being pressed by Muslim communalist party members into adopting this communal colour scheme. The BJP has no such excuse: the number of Muslims present when the flag was designed, was negligible, and these BJP Muslims (always paraded as truly "nationalist Muslims") are not known to have pressed any demands on this.

Moreover, thirdly, the Congress had to devise a national flag somehow representative of a nation which it conceived as "composite" and "multi-religious", not the symbol of a party representing a single ideology. By contrast, the BJP merely had to choose a party flag, representative only of its own political identity. Entirely by its own choice, the BJP leadership chose to burden a party which thrives on Hindu votes, with a symbol of subservience to the religion which killed millions of Hindus, including hundreds of thousands within our own lifetime. Many ordinary BJP and Sangh Parivar workers have expressed their dismay about this imposition, and identify A.B. Vajpayee as the crucial influence in giving the party flag a Muslim colour; though I would add that after all, the majority of the party leadership must have voted to accept their choice. The problem lies not with a few individuals; in different degrees, it affects the BJP if not the Sangh cadre as a whole.

Like the flag, many policies of the BJP are one-third Islamic. When Prime Minister V.P. Singh earmarked 5 million Rupees for the beautification of the Jama Masjid in Delhi, run by Singh's ally Imam Bukhari, Organiser protested loudly against this "blatant" case of "Muslim appeasement". But when Bhairon Singh Shekhawat became BJP Chief Minister in Rajasthan (admittedly in coalition with the more pro-Muslim Janata Dal), one of the first things he did was to grant 67 million Rupees for the beautification of the Ajmer mausoleum of Muinuddin Chishti, a Sufi saint who preached against "idolatry" and who was buried on the site of a demolished Hindu temple. Doubtlessly, the BJP did this to prove its "secularism", though it is not clear what could be secular about the monument of a Sufi fanatic, built with materials of destroyed Hindu temples. Orthodox biographies of Muinuddin say in so many words that he invited Mohammed Ghori for destroying the Chauhan Kingdom and establishing Islam, and that he accepted as a gift from Allah the daughter of a Hindu Prince who had been captured by Muslim raiders and presented to him. Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India have found pieces of many Hindu idols embedded in buildings all over the sprawling dargah.

The promised crackdown on illegal immigrants from Bangladesh (not really communal, merely the implementation of existing laws, but somehow vilified as communal) never materialized in any of the BJP-ruled states. The only state where an attempt was made, though without any substantial results, is Maharashtra, where it is left to the Shiv Sena to claim the credit for this slightly tougher policy. The BJP has a "Minority Cell", and its members are expected to be exemplary Muslims,

dutifully interrupting committee meetings for namaz.

Whether one applauds or deplors it, the actual facts are that the BJP, like the pre-Independence Congress, goes out of its way to put some token Muslims or Muslim symbols on display. Whatever the BJP may say about "Muslim appeasement" by Congress, its own record in this regard shows that it is equally subservient to the chimera of Muslim-certified secularism.

[1] BJP Constitution and Rules (1987 ed.), p.4.

[2] This was the explanation given in 1990 by the RSS Baudhik Pramukh (overseer for intellectual development) for Maharashtra to historian Shrikant Talageri (personal communication, December 1995).

[3] The story is told by K.R. Malkani: *The Politics of Ayodhya and Hindu-Muslim Relations* (Har-Anand Publ., Delhi 1993), p.175-179.

# 5. How the Rama card was thrown away

Ever since the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1996, the BJP was as silent as possible on the Ayodhya issue. It is just too embarrassed, and avoids mentioning the very name of Ayodhya or Rama. On 17 December 1992 already, A.B. Vajpayee declared in the Lok Sabha: "We are very sad at what happened in Ayodhya on the 6th December." L.K. Advani, who had been the front man of the Ayodhya movement until he broke down in tears at the sight of the demolition, had narrowly succeeded in making a dignified statement during his first press meet after the demolition (thanks to the insistent prodding of one of his well-wishers who merely happened to be present, and who convinced Advani to replace the weak and apologetic statement which his assistant had prepared with a better one), but more recently he too joined Vajpayee in dismissing the historic event as a "Himalayan blunder".

Of course, most of us would have preferred a smooth unopposed transition from misplaced mosque to fitting temple in Ayodhya, but in the circumstances, the prospects for temple construction without this direct action were bleak. All that the BJP had achieved at the purely political level was to provoke the 1991 Places of Worship Act, which freezes the status of places of worship as it was in the colonial age (depriving them of the benefits of independence). Therefore, in their comments, the BJP leaders should have shown some appreciation for the constraints which drove the Kar Sevaks to make possible the construction for which Advani c.s. had been campaigning.

I still have a high opinion of Mr. Advani personally, but he has proved to be a true representative of this confused tendency which I call BJP secularism. Trying to be nice to everyone is fine, but should one enter politics and defy a formidable enemy like Islam (which Advani had done by implicitly challenging Islam's right to usurp a Hindu sacred site) if one is not prepared for some rough weather? With but few exceptions, such as Kalyan Singh and Vijay Kumar Malhotra, most BJP leaders now take the evasive or apologetic line on Ayodhya.

The truth of the matter is that the BJP leadership never had its heart in the Ayodhya campaign. When outside factors and the VHP brought the Ayodhya issue centre-stage in the mid-80s, the BJP joined the movement because of its apparent potential for mass mobilization. Yet, even after the VHP's Ram Shila Pujas (consecrating bricks in every village and taking them in procession to Ayodhya, autumn 1989) became a roaring success, it took Prime Minister V.P. Singh's prodding to get the BJP to organize the fabled Rath Yatra (October 1990). Singh had made the ludicrous promise to Imam Bukhari of securing the disputed site for the Muslim community, and he needed some serious Hindu pressure to provide him with an excuse to renege on his promise.[1] After riding the Rama wave to an electoral breakthrough in May-June 1991, the BJP started distancing itself from the Ayodhya issue. By 6 December 1992, many activists had lost patience with the BJP,

and a vanguard group organized the historic instance of direct action, all while keeping the BJP leadership (deemed the weakest link in the Hindutva chain) in the dark.

When the Babri walls came tumbling down, L.K. Advani, who had looked like such a divine hero in his Ram Rath, could not help shedding tears over the damage done to the BJP's secular self-image. The same thing happened to many BJP office-bearers at the Delhi headquarters when they heard the news about the demolition (so I was told by one of them). Even VHP leader Ashok Singhal, certainly more sincere in his Ayodhya commitment than the politicians, tried to stop the activists, until they threatened to pull off his dhoti if he didn't shut up. If we are to believe the secularist commentators, all that was theatre. Well, no, it was quite genuine; just as genuine as Murli Manohar Joshi's jubilation, which was gleefully highlighted by the same secularists.

If the Indian media were not as corrupt as they are (power corrupts, and the media wield tremendous power, so), they would have found out and told us who exactly masterminded the demolition; it was not so hard to find out. But instead, the Indian media spurned the scoop of the year and insisted on the politically more useful version blaming Mr. Advani, somewhat like Jawaharlal Nehru's attempt to implicate Veer Savarkar in the Mahatma Gandhi murder.

Frightened by the Muslim-cum-secularist sound and fury after the demolition, and shocked by its own failure to live up to its secular and disciplined self-image, the BJP completed its (until then gradual) retreat from Ayodhya overnight. Even four years later, any talk of a return to the Ayodhya plank was dismissed by the party leadership as absurd. As party spokesperson Sushma Swaraj said (November 1996), in an unabashed show of opportunism as the only guide in the party's choices: "You cannot cash a cheque twice." Until then, one could have thought that the BJP's silence on Ayodhya was part of a reasoned policy of shifting the focus of action to the judicial debate before the Allahabad High Court, which has been deliberating on the dispute since 1950 (the Court's pussyfooting is itself one of the causes of the polarizing and violent turn which the dispute has taken), but has recently been showing real signs of life; now, Ms. Swaraj's statement proves that there is no deep strategy involved, merely a tactic of grabbing whichever vote-catching issues present themselves, and dropping them when they become less useful or too difficult to handle.

The BJP's enemies spread two mutually exclusive views of the BJP: that it is a rabid fundamentalist party bound to turn India into a theocracy, and that it is a placid opportunistic party which merely uses religion for its all too mundane goal of enjoying the spoils of power. Recent developments have given a verdict between these two, in favour of the opportunism theory.

The BJP's next election campaigns featured harmless secular slogans like "good government" (suraaj), though a few candidates in Hindutva-sensitized areas in U.P. also tried to capitalize on the Demolition, boasting that "we did what we promised". Still, the secular non-Ayodhya profile cost the party many seats in the 1996 U.P. state elections (as Kalyan Singh has admitted), losses not fully compensated by the party's gains in other districts, which were often due to the disunity in the anti-BJP camp. This was the first sign that the BJP cannot go on taking the Hindu voter for granted indefinitely. On the other hand, the 1995 state elections in Maharashtra and Gujarat and the 1996 Lok Sabha elections were undeniably victories for the BJP. So, the secularists in the BJP feel assured

that Hindu activism is dead, or is at any rate not a vote attractor. Yet, this secular posturing may also prove to be a "cheque which cannot be cashed twice", for the BJP's credibility as a provider of clean and effective governance has plummeted. The performance of its state governments and the recent corruption and defection scandals have confirmed to the public what party insiders have been telling me for some years: the party leadership has no greater ambition than to be the Congress B-team.

Just like Congress has been capitalizing on the sacrifices of the Freedom movement for decades, the BJP tries to capitalize on its association with the Hindu cause. The equation of the BJP with militant Hinduism is now mostly kept alive by its enemies (who, fortunately for the BJP, dominate the media). The effect is that the BJP can take the Hindu-minded voter for granted all while fishing after the non-Hindu and the anti-Hindu vote, and making the concomitant concessions. But the real commitment to the Hindu cause is now as far removed from the BJP leadership's thinking as Gandhian ideals are from the most corrupt Congress leader.

A movement having the size of the Ayodhya agitation can only make sense if major historical issues are involved, in this case the role of Islam in Indian history, of which the destruction of the Rama temple and its replacement with a mosque are perfectly representative. Therefore, historians like Harsh Narain, G.L. Verma, K.S. Lal and Sita Ram Goel responded to the Ayodhya controversy by collecting and presenting several types of evidence for the thousands upon thousands of temple destructions wrought by Islam in India, and by pinpointing the large and unambiguous scriptural basis for this Islamic iconoclasm. They faced the fact that it is not possible to raise the Ayodhya issue in a consistent and credible way without tracing the problem to its source, viz. the Quran and the model behaviour of prophet Mohammed, who destroyed all the idols in the Kaaba and had all traces of other religions in Arabia removed or destroyed.

By contrast, the BJP tried to redefine the Ayodhya debate away from its religious basis and into a matter of secular patriotism: the "national hero" Rama versus the "foreign invader" Babar. In reality, of course, nationality or geographical provenance had nothing to do with it: the native convert Malik Kafur was a great temple-destroyer, while the foreign British colonizer left temples in peace and even invested men and money in their upkeep and scholarly description.

BJP supporters started claiming that Islam itself condemns temple destruction and that a prayer offered in a mosque built on a destroyed temple is held to be invalid by Islam itself. In essence, they claimed Ayodhya for the Hindus in the name of Islam. One Hindu professor even revealed to me that the Islamic agitators had falsified Islamic scripture to make it sound hostile to Hinduism while originally it had been quite in agreement with Hindu scripture. The capacity of Hindus for self-deception is truly extraordinary. They can invent any fairy-tale just to avoid facing the fact that Islam has declared war on Hinduism in the 7th century AD and that it has never rescinded this declaration of war.

But of course, no one was fooled. Not one Muslim replied: "Now you come to mention it, this mosque has been standing there illegally for centuries without any of us realizing it. Our Quran orders us to remove this nuisance to make way for a Hindu temple." All the Rafiq Zakarias and



Asghar Ali Engineers, always so eager to extol the tolerance and magnanimity of Islam, unitedly refused to oblige the BJP spokesmen, and solidly defended the right of Muslims to occupy the sacred sites of others (it was only after the much-maligned Demolition that Wahiduddin Khan and Asghar Ali Engineer came to their senses and wisely advised Muslims not to press for the reimposition of a mosque on this Hindu sacred site).

This wilful confusion and half-heartedness about the issues inherently raised by the Ayodhya controversy made it impossible for the BJP to state its case, or rather Hindu society's case, in a straightforward and convincing manner. While thousands of mosques have forcibly displaced temples, the VHP demand was for just three, and the BJP narrowed that figure down to one. Seen in the proper perspective, this was incredibly modest: the guilt of Islam is staggering, yet the Hindu fundamentalist party is satisfied with its abandonment of one sacred site which was not under Muslim control anyway. But in the BJP perspective, this extremely modest demand came to look unreasonable and fanatical ("such a nationwide fuss over a mere building"), precisely because the whole context of the staggering guilt of Islam was kept out of the debate as much as possible.

Consider the result of the Ayodhya campaign. While it is totally obvious that a Hindu sacred site belongs to the Hindus and to no one else, all the non-fringe Indian media strongly condemned the Hindu reappropriation of the Ram Janmabhoomi site. While no religious Westerner or East Asian would approve of the take-over of the sacred sites of his own religion by outsiders, Western and East Asian media (not to speak of Muslim media) were united in their strong condemnation when Hindus tried to undo just such a take-over. While in other conflicts (say, the Gulf War) both warring parties end up getting some moral or actual support from somewhere, in this case there was no trace of support for the Hindu position anywhere in the world. The Ayodhya campaign was conducted in such a way as to leave Hindu society totally bereft of friends. Without exaggeration, the BJP's Ayodhya campaign was the single biggest public relations disaster in world history.

The BJP has never subjected itself to the critical introspection which this experience called for. To be sure, it disliked the opprobrium intensely, but it merely tried to wriggle out from under it, dispensing with the trouble of making a proper evaluation and of articulating a consistent stand. There is no such thing as a Hindutva-inspired analysis of the difference which the Demolition has made for the Hindu cause in general or even for the Sangh's or the BJP's strategic position specifically. The numerous publications on the significance of the Demolition are all by secularists and Muslims. Without doing any analysis of its own, the BJP effectively plumped for the secularist view that the Demolition was wrong, and compromised the whole Ayodhya movement along with it. So, it kind of apologized and changed the subject.

[1] It may be recalled that some of V.P. Singh's scheming on Ayodhya was made public by Arun Shourie, the only editor who had opened his columns for articles on the history of Islamic iconoclasm; and that a short while later, he was sacked as Indian Express editor. One of the hands behind his removal was Nana Deshmukh, supposedly a Hindutva stalwart.

# 6. Sangh Parivar, the last Gandhians

When in 1980, the secularist tendency led by Nana Deshmukh and Atal Behari Vajpayee imposed "Gandhian socialism" on the newly founded BJP as its official ideology, all the establishment secularists laughed at this transparent attempt to acquire a new secular identity.[1] "This party is neither Gandhian nor socialist", they said. The party was in fact more socialist than it would like to admit after liberalization became the new orthodoxy, certainly more socialist than the non-socialist "cleverest bourgeois scoundrel" Gandhi ever was, but we can agree that it was less socialist than was normative in 1980. What interests us more, is whether the BJP, always accused of having historical links with Gandhi's assassin, can legitimately be called Gandhian.

My view is that within the present political spectrum, the BJP is definitely and by far the most Gandhian party. The former socialists and populists, who had inherited part of the Gandhian legacy through Jayaprakash Narayan, have become nothing but casteist interest groups steeped in coercive tactics and crime; there is nothing Gandhian about them anymore. Congress, of course, presided over the betrayal of every single Gandhian policy under Nehru's Prime Ministership, and its level of morality and dedication to the nation is nothing that Gandhi would be proud of.

By contrast, the BJP, or rather the Sangh Parivar as a whole, is definitely a Gandhian movement in many respects. The Sangh Parivar supports economic self-reliance (swadeshi) coupled with cultural self-reliance. The Sangh workers shun luxury and move around by public transport, in the lowest-class compartments; in communications as well as in their martial arts practice (with the stick), they are deliberately settling for older technology, quite comparable to Gandhi's choice for living in the past with his charkha. Sangh whole-timers practise the typically Gandhian mix of politics and asceticism (including sexual abstinence). The Sangh protests against Miss World flesh shows, the promotion of meat consumption by American fast food chains, the unnecessary and disruptive promotion of tooth paste at the expense of indigenous methods of dental hygiene, and other instances of dumping India's heritage in favour of undesirable and/or foreign alternatives. This earns Sangh activists haughty smirks from the elite, but that itself is yet another point in common with Gandhi and his spinning-wheel.

In some respects, the RSS follows Gandhi even where Gandhi was decidedly un-Hindu. The seeming unwillingness to use the modern-most technology and media (which is gradually being superseded by modernizing efforts originating largely in NRI circles) is Gandhian enough, but is unwarranted from a Hindu viewpoint. The ancient Hindus in the Indus-Saraswati civilization were in the vanguard of humanity in science and technology; Gandhi had his retro-mania from Christian romantics like Thoreau and Tolstoy. The combination of social work with celibacy is characteristic of certain Roman Catholic monastic orders, but is foreign to Hindu tradition, where a clean separation is maintained between, on the one hand, the self-supporting worldly society, which takes

care of its needy and in which every able-bodied young man is expected to start a family, and on the other hand the circles of celibate sadhus from whom no worldly service is required because their spiritual practice is contribution enough.

Three central aspects of the Sangh's work are typically Gandhian, and are also the key to its success. One is its grass-roots work, its impressive record in actual social service, which is far larger and more deserving of a Nobel prize than Mother Teresa's heavily foreign-financed operations. Like for Mahatma Gandhi, politics for the Sangh is but one aspect of a much larger social programme carried out by the citizens' own initiative and effort. This creates a much closer rapport with the masses, a movement with much stronger roots than purely political movements like the Hindu Mahasabha.

The second Gandhi-like aspect of the Sangh's success is its religious dimension. Though the BJP insists on its secular character, many of the Sangh-affiliated organizations and individuals are not that shy about their Hindu moorings, and this is precisely one of the reasons why they strike a chord of confidence among the people. Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi made the independence movement into a mass movement by giving it a religious dimension; it is for the same reason that the Sangh has become a mass movement firmly rooted in the general population, a pool of Hindu commitment on which the BJP can draw at voting time.

The third Gandhian trait in the Sangh's style of functioning is the moral dimension which it gives to its politics. The BJP advertises itself as a disciplined party free of corruption. When during the 1996 Lok Sabha election campaign, Narasimha Rao's men tried to implicate L.K. Advani in a financial scandal, the public reacted with a sincere disbelief: he may be a communalist, but we never saw any sign of corruption in him. My own experience confirms that in general, the workers of the Sangh-affiliated organizations are sincerely dedicated to the well-being of their country and society without expecting personal benefits in return.[2] Of late, this reputation has been corroded by scandals involving the BJP (though it remains the cleanest party by far), and even RSS grassroots recruitment is feeling the effect of the general spread of consumerism in Hindu society. Traditionally, Hindus have held self-abnegation as practiced by Sangh workers in high esteem, but many members of the new generation (yuppie or goonda) merely find it funny; the RSS-Gandhian ethos has now become an upstream effort defying the spirit of the times.

The kinship between the Sangh and Gandhi is real enough in these positive aspects, but it is just as palpable in some negative respects. To start with a small but nasty point, Gandhi thought his own position (call it the Gandhian sampradaya/sect) represented the whole of Hinduism, both at the political and the religio-philosophical level, and strongly resented alternative centres of Hindu mobilization. Though calling himself a Hindu, he claimed the leadership of the whole nation and not just of the Hindus, though the British secularists and the Muslims never conceded this more-than-Hindu identity to him (certainly a parallel with the Bharatiya rather than Hindu Janata Party). When the Muslim League became a formidable challenger to Gandhi's claim, it would have been in the nation's and his own interest to let the Hindu Mahasabha counterbalance the League's influence; moderates normally use the presence of radicals as a useful bargaining-chip. But Gandhi and his Congress wanted the whole Hindu cake to themselves.

The same intolerance of or at least annoyance with rivals for the Hindu constituency is in evidence in the Sangh. In surveys of Sangh history, there is remarkably little reference to the Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu organizations. Especially glaring is the RSS reluctance to acknowledge the role of Babarao Savarkar (elder brother of V. D. Savarkar and an outstanding revolutionary in his own right). It was Babarao who had drafted the original RSS pledge and included the term Hindu Rashtra in it. He had suggested the saffron RSS flag. He had merged his own Tarun Hindu Sabha as well as Sant Panchelgaonkar Maharaj's Mukteshwar Dal into the fledgling RSS. He was responsible for bringing into the RSS such luminaries as Bhalji Pendharkar, the noted film director and later the Dadasaheb Phalke award winner Kashinath Pant Limaye who became the provincial head of the Maharashtra RSS, Babu Padmaraj Jain and other. Baburao toured extensively for the RSS in spite of his failing health. Both Hedgewar and Golwalkar had great respect for Babarai. Yet The RSS Story by K. R. Malkani does not even mention Babarao's name. In fact some narrow minded RSS leaders from Pune had tempered with the chapter in Babarao's contribution (written by P. N. Gokhale) that deals with Babarao's contribution to the growth of the RSS. Similarly, no acknowledgement is made of the help which the RSS received from the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha everywhere.

During the 1989 elections, when the BJP had an electoral alliance with the Janata Dal, Balraj Madhok stood as a candidate for the reconstituted Bharatiya Jan Sangh against the Janata Dal candidate in Lucknow. Most Hindutva people were eager to work for Madhok, "one of us", against the JD secularist officially supported by the BJP. When Madhok looked sure to win the election, Vajpayee hurried to Lucknow to discipline the BJP workers; he could not tolerate that a non-BJP man would enter the Lok Sabha in spite of his proven merit for the Hindu cause.

In a way, the Sangh attitude mirrors that of mendacious secularists who always label anyone speaking up for the Hindus as an "RSS man": they identify the Hindu cause with the Sangh. Generally they do not see beyond the confines of the Sangh and are practically unaware that there are conscious Hindus outside the Sangh.

A typical Gandhian flaw in BJP functioning, the result of mixing self-denial (a personal discipline) with politics (a public affair), is the absence of any healthy sense of quid pro quo. Gandhi always sacrificed Indian or Hindu interests without asking anything in return, hoping that this would soften the heart of the beneficiary and put him in the right mood to give something back at his own initiative. Thus, after the outbreak of World War 1, "Indian political leaders, 'moderate' as well as 'extremist', were unanimous that the people of India should support the British cause against the Germans, but only for a price: the promise of home rule after the war. Gandhi was almost alone in rejecting the idea of a political bargain with the British; he cherished the hope that in return for unconditional support, a grateful and victorious Britain would give India her due when the war was over." [3] As it turned out, the British took Gandhi's services (recruiting Indian volunteers to die a useless and horrible death in the war against Germans who had done the Indians no harm) but, except for an embarrassing medal of loyal service to the British Empire, they gave him nothing in return. In the real world, politicians bargain for a tangible quid pro quo and don't count on gratitude.

This Gandhian idiosyncrasy has set a trend in Indian foreign policy. In his infamous 1954 "Panch

sheel" treaty with China, Nehru conceded China's claim to Tibet but extracted no Chinese acceptance of India's established borders in return. In the Indo-Pak wars, Indian successes on the battlefield were squandered in Nehru's vainglorious attempt to posture as an apostle of internationalism (bringing in the UNO in the Kashmir dispute, 1948), or as an occasion to show off India's sportsmanship (ceding the territory conquered in 1965), or in return for a meaningless declaration of good intent (releasing the Pakistani prisoners for a never-kept promise to keep the Kashmir issue bilateral in 1971). In 1996, India parted with a large percentage of the Ganga water supply in an empty show of generosity to Bangladesh, effectively hurting its own agriculture and shipping industry, without even asking anything in return: not that Bangladesh treat the Hindu minority correctly, not that it restore the Chakma lands to its Chakma refugees, not that it take back its illegal Muslim migrants, not that it close its borders to separatist guerrilla groups terrorizing India's northeast.

In this habit of making unilateral gestures to undeserving enemies, Gandhi had no followers more imitative than the BJP. This party always sells out its principles and pays homage to everything and everyone its enemies cherish, without ever exacting even a promise (let alone a real bargain) in return. No matter how many concessions A.B. Vajpayee offered during his 13-day tenure as Prime Minister in search of a majority, no matter how hard he kicked his Kashmiri refugee supporters in the groin by promising to preserve Art. 370, no matter how sincerely he condemned the Ayodhya demolition, he did not get a single undertaking from a non-"communal" parliamentarian to support the government during the confidence vote. No matter how deep the BJP leaders crawl in the dust begging for certificates of good secular conduct from their enemies, this has never yielded them anything except contempt. But so far, everything indicates that they can be counted upon to continue in the same direction.

[1] We omit discussion of the lack of an agreed meaning for the term "Gandhian socialism". An insider told me that during one of the constituent meetings of the budding BJP, a vote was taken on whether the ideology should be "integral humanism" or "Gandhian socialism"; the latter won with a small majority, but to please everyone, it was then decided that the "Gandhian socialism" is actually the same thing as "integral humanism". The incident reveals the lack of ideological seriousness in the BJP. Similar illustrations of this weakness include Govindacharya's 1996 enthusiasm for "social engineering", a term dear to totalitarian regimes by which he meant simply the induction of more Backward Caste candidates in the elections.

[2] It is a different matter that this personal modesty is often combined with a lack of collective Sangh modesty. Many Sangh workers are extremely touchy about criticism of the Sangh, even when they don't mind criticism of Hinduism or India.

[3] B.R. Nanda: Gandhi and his Critics (OUP, Delhi 1993), p.116.

# 7. Gandhian Non-Violence

One point where the BJP seems to be decidedly un-Gandhian is defence policy. Whereas Gandhi had advocated a strictly non-violent strategy including an unarmed defence against the impending Japanese invasion, the BJP advocates a strong defence capability including weapons of mass destruction. Yet, even here the BJP is more Gandhian than one would expect.

The famous quotation of Mahatma Gandhi on Hindu cowards and Muslim bullies deserves to be read in full: "There is no doubt in my mind that in the majority of quarrels the Hindus come out second best. But my own experience confirms the opinion that the Mussalman as a rule is a bully, and the Hindu as a rule is a coward. I have noticed this in railway trains, on public roads, and in the quarrels which I had the privilege of settling. Need the Hindu blame the Mussalman for his cowardice? Where there are cowards, there will always be bullies. They say that in Saharanpur the Mussalmans looted houses, broke open safes and, in one case, a Hindu woman's modesty was outraged. Whose fault was this? Mussalmans can offer no defence for the execrable conduct, it is true. But I, as a Hindu, am more ashamed of Hindu cowardice than I am angry at the Mussalman bullying. Why did not the owners of the houses looted die in the attempt to defend their possessions? Where were the relatives of the outraged sister at the time of the outrage? Have they no account to render of themselves? My non-violence does not admit of running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice."<sup>[1]</sup>

Gandhi declares that the owners of the looted houses ought to have chosen to "die in the attempt to defend their possessions". But why should the lawful owner die, in punishment of what crime? If anyone has to die at all, would it not be more fair, more just, to let the aggressor die rather than his victim? Justice does not figure in Gandhi's calculus of non-violence at all. People should innocently die as some kind of moral gesture rather than inflict a just punishment on the aggressor: a morbid kind of personal asceticism eclipses any socially responsible concern for public justice. Or does Gandhi mean that people should expose themselves to the risk of dying by fighting the aggressor rather than flee? While Gandhi did make many morbid and ridiculous statements about the virtue of getting killed (e.g. about the cows willingly offering themselves to the tiger until the tiger gets tired of beef and turns vegetarian), here he says: "I prefer violence to cowardice." Gandhi is ashamed that Hindus failed to put up an effective self-defence, and wants them to do better next time.

Here, for once, Gandhi seems to link up with a whole tradition of mature thinkers who have taken a proportionalist view of the acceptability of violence: in cases where force can reasonably be expected to make the difference (not when the situation is hopeless, as pointed out by Thomas Aquinas in his theory of "just war"), it is lawful to use force to ward off aggression. In its own view of itself, the RSS has precisely taken up the challenge formulated here by Gandhi: "Need the Hindu blame the Mussalman for his own cowardice?" Gandhi calls on Hindus not to be cowards in the

face of Muslim bullies. In response, the RSS claims it builds martial qualities and equips its workers with the strength to face bullies. There is nothing un-Gandhian about RSS martial arts practice. Even the Shiv Sena, the Mumbai Mafia which organized the defence of the Hindus when the Muslims were starting a pogrom in January 1993 could claim to have done Gandhi's bidding (and then overdone it a bit; but Gandhi too used to overdo things).

But then there is the other, unrealistic face of Gandhi, the morbid face of "when slapped, turn the other cheek". Even in this extremist view of non-violence, the RSS is often a follower of Gandhi. During the Khalistani separatist struggle in Panjab (1981-93), hundreds of RSS and BJP men were killed by the Khalistanis, yet this did not provoke a single act of retaliation. When in ca. 1990, and again in 1996, Communist militants started killing RSS men in Kerala, the RSS was very slow to react in kind. The Islamic bomb attacks on Sangh centres in Chennai and elsewhere, the murders of BJP politicians in UP, Mumbai and elsewhere, they all have not provoked any counter-attacks. Anti-Hindu governments in Bihar and West Bengal have achieved some success in preventing the growth of sizable RSS chapters by means of ruthless intimidation and violence, all without having to fear any RSS retaliation.

The RSS often celebrates its "martyrs", which it calls "shahid", unmindful of the fact that this is a strictly Islamic term.[2] The word shahid is related to shahada ("witnessing", viz. to the two truth claims of the Islamic creed: there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet), and means "a witness [to the Islamic faith]", i.e. one who has fallen during Islam's war against the unbelievers. To use this term for an unbeliever killed by the believers is an insult to both sides. Honouring those who died for the cause is fine, but the thing to note is that the RSS never honours those who killed for the cause. Muslims at least honour the kafir-killer (ghazi) along with the martyr (shahid), but the Sangh follows Gandhi in choosing to extol dying rather than killing for the cause.

Is this, then, a plea for more violence? Should the RSS start to live up to its mediatic image of "the world's largest private militia"? Should it drop its stick-fighting gymnastics and move on to more realistic training with AK-47s? That is the plea which I sometimes hear from younger Hindutva activists. Frustrated by the leadership's appeasement policies, they want action, they want to "teach them a lesson" (i.e. to the Muslims). It has been done before: during Partition, Sangh workers were quite active in taking revenge on Muslims inside India (as eyewitnesses have told me), doing some bullying of their own, though I am not aware of similar martial RSS feats in the territory allotted to Pakistan.[3] At any rate, the use of force seems to be the only alternative they can imagine for the confused and weak-kneed policies of the present leadership.

Now that Hindus have practically disappeared from Pakistan and Bangladesh, in the future most Hindu-Muslim killing will take place in India, where Hindus are in a good position to kill a great many Muslims. Of course, the time is near when the quality of Muslim armament will catch up with its already large quantity (to divulge a police public-secret tabooed in secularist publications on riots), and Muslim "revenge" operations of the Mumbai explosions (12 March 1993) type can become a routine affair. Still, in the next few decades the non-Muslim army and police will remain a decisive factor blocking the way to a definitive defeat of Hindus by Muslims in India, though they may remain unable (mostly because their hands are tied by politicians) to stamp out anti-Hindu and

anti-Indian terrorism and armed separatism. Given this configuration of forces, I certainly take the possibility into account that Hindu militant groups may develop, which will try to settle newly arising communal confrontations by means of "direct action", probably starting with the Kashmir-type situation which is developing in the northeast. I think it is in Hindu society's interest to avert such a development by means of ideological warfare.

If Hindus want to win the life-and-death struggle with Islam, they will have to do it in a Hindu, not in an Islamic way. Some Hindutva activists quote with approving bluster Veer Savarkar's dictum that for every Hindu woman dishonoured by Muslims, a Muslim woman (if not a dozen Muslim women) should be given the same treatment; and that such retaliation would quickly teach the Muslims to behave. I am told that to this view of Savarkar's, Swami Karpatri, that genuine Hindu fundamentalist if ever there was one, has replied that defending Hinduism against Islam makes little sense if it means interiorizing Islamic attitudes: "When a dog has bitten you, does it mean that you have to bite back?" Perhaps giving tit for tat creates a good feeling at the time of the act, but a movement which wants to be the vanguard of Hindu civilization has to aim higher than that.

The Hindu value of ahimsa, so prominently praised as the "highest dharma" in the Mahabharata, is not the same thing as passive masochism, whatever Gandhi may have read into it. Even so, ahimsa does imply a restraint on the use of violence. Force is sometimes necessary, as Krishna explains to Arjuna, but it should not be resorted to lightly. Indeed, Krishna and the Pandavas exhaust all possibilities of compromise before they resolve to do battle. The use of force may not be altogether avoidable in the face of multiple aggressions against India and Hinduism, but to rely on force as a matter of long-term strategy to save India from its enemies would be contrary to Hindu ethics. It would also be very unwise.

Partly due to Gandhi's lingering influence, Hindus tend to overreact to the shiver in their own eye, all while justifying or at least ignoring the beam in their enemy's eye. The mass killing of Hindus in East Bengal in 1971 and the constant petty terrorizing of Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh to chase them out have not moved Hindus in India to retaliate in any way; they never even talk about it. By contrast, a single murder by a Hindu, that of Gandhi himself, was enough to throw the Hindutva movement off course for decades. There is no dearth of Hindu soft-brains who feel guilty for the Ayodhya demolition, and who preach that Hindus should make amends for it. A large-scale killing or forcible expulsion of Muslims will expose Hindu society to the ferocious indignation of the Muslim as well as the non-Muslim world, and experience shows that the Hindus have no stomach for that. So, apart from being bad publicity, any major act of violence may also help to paralyze a Hindu revival.

Leaving apart the influence of Gandhism, there are also honourable and purely Hindu reasons for feeling uncomfortable with violent victories, viz. when violence was a wasteful and unnecessary method resorted to out of being too lazy to try more subtle ways. As we shall demonstrate in the last chapters, there is an excellent alternative. Gandhi's ahimsa failed because he did not wage the ideological struggle (except to some extent against the British, with whom he also succeeded to an extent). He could have thrown the Muslim League on the defensive if he had exposed the Islamic ideology behind the League's separatism. He refused to do that, and if the Sangh continues to



follow in his footsteps on this issue, it will meet the same defeat. Whether by Gandhian appeasement or occasional bursts of jihad-type violence, the Sangh is bound to lose the struggle against Islam. Its only chance lies in the ideological struggle, the royal highway to Ram Rajya.

[1] "Hindu-Muslim Tension: Its Cause and Cure", Young India, 29/5/1924; reproduced in M.K. Gandhi: The Hindu-Muslim Unity, p.35-36.

[2] Unlike the day-to-day politicians in the BJP, the more clerical Sangh spokesmen in the VHP do use proper Hindi, like hutatma or atmabalidan instead of shahid. Though terminology is not important in itself, it is a good indicator of the speaker's level of understanding.

[3] I assume that if the RSS had accomplished anything during the Hindu flight from Pakistan, it would have devoted a publication to celebrating its heroes and martyrs there.

# 8. The Sangh's anti-intellectualism

A very serious flaw which Gandhians and the Sangh have in common is their anti-intellectualism. Though Gandhi reputedly rebuked RSS founder K.B. Hedgewar for not publishing any doctrinal statements, i.e. for not giving any intellectual articulation to his nationalist movement, he essentially shared Hedgewar's aversion for an intellectual job well done. Both of them made people march many miles, both led their followers to make great sacrifices, and both failed to substantially raise their followers' political understanding. They did not bother to educate them (and themselves) in analyzing the character of the different forces in the field, all on the plea that "an ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of theory".

Instead of developing an analysis and tracing the Hindu-Muslim conflict to its (Quranic) roots, they chose to work on people's emotions. Gandhi practised emotional intimidation on the Hindus with his ascetic gimmicks, but failed completely before the doctrinal wall of rejection which Islam had erected against his "Hindu-Muslim unity". Gandhi's pleas for this interreligious unity were like the attempt at air travel by a pre-modern person: without studying the laws of physics and applying them through the appropriate technology, all he could achieve was to jump from a tower and fall to his death. Calling for the tearing-down of the wall of hatred between Muslims and non-Muslims without properly understanding its causes was an anti-rational endeavour doomed to bitter failure; Gandhi merely banged his own head against the wall until his skull broke.

Gandhi's anti-intellectualism was evident in other fields too. He refused to make a proper study of the history and doctrines of his own religion, replacing its complexity and richness with the monolatry of a single booklet, the Bhagavad-Gita, which he also refused to study properly, subjecting it to a dogmatic sentimental interpretation instead. Thus, Gandhi's reading of the Gita (heavily influenced by the "Sermon on the Mount" aspect of Christianity) included the untenable claim that the Gita teaches absolute non-violence. In reality, one of the Gita's main themes is refuting the typically Gandhian anti-confrontationist arguments given by Arjuna in the first chapter.

Admittedly, Gandhi was not the first to twist Hindu scripture to suit his own pet theories, e.g. Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva managed to identify each his own version of Vedanta philosophy as the "true" meaning of the Upanishads. But these acharyas applied their intellect and erudition to make their point, while Gandhi haughtily rejected the importance of intellectual skills in discerning the true meaning of a text, claiming that moral character was the decisive factor in correctly understanding scripture. He was wrong: people of bad character may understand scripture quite well (an example from Hindu tradition is Ravana, a well-educated scoundrel), while people of good character may not understand it at all (e.g. all those good people who are outside the civilizational ambit of a given scriptural tradition).[1]

The result of Gandhi's anti-intellectualism was that he conducted his politics like a sleep-walker: wilfully blind to the character of the forces he was dealing with. And since people, even very ordinary people, cannot be satisfied for long with a diet of exalted emotions and counter-commonsensical activism, his refusal to address the doctrinal aspect of certain political problems (the Muslim challenge, the paradoxical situation created in Indian politics by World War 2, the rising lure of Marxism) made people look for an ideological framework elsewhere. Gandhi's focus on emotions was good for spectacular scenes of millions marching, but it failed to achieve the political goals which these millions thought they were serving. The independence of a united India never came, nor was truncated India in any sense a Ram Rajya or a realization of any ideal Gandhi ever stood for.

The Communists, by contrast, worked on people's minds. They gave them (not just their card-carrying foot soldiers but nearly the whole opinion-making and decision-making classes) a framework with which to analyze political events and cultural trends. It is quite clear which approach was more fruitful: soon after Marxism appeared on the Calcutta scene, it eclipsed the Hindu Renaissance (when Sri Aurobindo retired from public life, people like Hedgewar failed to take over his torch), and by the time Gandhi died, Gandhism as a genuine political movement had been blown away by Marxism. For several decades after Independence, non-Communist politicians implemented Communist policies, because they were mentally trapped in Marxist schemes of analysis; by contrast, even nominally Gandhian politicians betrayed everything Gandhi ever stood for (except Muslim appeasement, which Indian Marxists also promoted). In the long run, emotions are inconsequential, and the Communists prospered and could make others implement their own policies just by promoting their own thought.

Like Gandhi, the RSS and BJP cloak many of their campaigns and political demands in terms of emotions, and this approach proves as futile as in Gandhi's case. Thus, a complaint about the lack of national consciousness in the school curriculum is titled: "The education system does not promote national sentiments".[2] Patriotic feelings develop naturally on the basis of a genuinely felt common destiny, but in the case of many Muslims, this natural process is thwarted by the Islamic ideas in which they are indoctrinated. So, the only way to "promote national sentiments" is a job of intellectual persuasion: remove this doctrinal hurdle by helping Muslims to discover that the basic doctrine of Islam is mistaken. If you are too lazy to study Islam and find out what is wrong with it, all your efforts to "promote national sentiments" among youngsters brought up on a diet of anti-Hindu teachings will prove futile.

The BJP's statements on Ayodhya are full of calls to "respect people's sentiments" (the title of the BJP brochure containing L.K. Advani's historic Lok Sabha speech on Ayodhya dd. 7 August 1989).[3] In general, sentiments should be respected, but not absolutely. Sometimes, hurting sentiments is the inevitable and relatively unimportant consequence of a rightful and necessary act, e.g. there is no doubt that imperialist Muslims felt hurt in their sentiments when the BJP supported Hindu society's claim to Ayodhya, ignoring the Muslim community's cherished God-given right to occupy other religions' sacred places. At any rate, sentiments cannot be the basis of a judicially enforceable claim: thieves also develop a sentimental attachment to some of their stolen goods, yet

that doesn't give them a right to these goods. The Ayatollahs may have been genuinely hurt in their sentiments by 'The Satanic Verses', but that gave them no right to kill its author or even to ban the book. Even people who feel no sentimental attachment to the Rama Janmabhoomi site, such as myself, can find that the site rightfully belongs to Hindu society alone, on impeccably objective and unsentimental grounds. The appeal to sentiment is normally but the last resort of people who have failed in defending their case on more serious juridical and historical grounds.

Gandhi's experiences should have taught the Sangh that emotionalism is powerless. So should its own failures with this approach. For seventy years the RSS has been busy inculcating "patriotic feelings", and this has not made an iota of difference in preventing the rise of separatism in Panjab, Kashmir and the northeast. The result of this approach in the Ayodhya dispute should serve as an eye-opener: the appeal to sentiment failed to win a single skeptic or secularist or Muslim over to the Hindu position. Spreading knowledge is a far more powerful way of influencing public opinion than these impotent attempts to promote certain emotions. Yet the Sangh Parivar has not adapted its strategy, it simply repeats a strategy which is a proven failure. That brings us to another typically Gandhian flaw in the Sangh: its stubborn refusal to learn from feedback.

A defining characteristic of all life forms is that, to a greater or lesser extent, they act upon feedback: they adapt their behaviour in reaction to its observed effect. If you put your hand in boiling water, you feel pain and immediately pull your hand back; by contrast, a stone falling into this boiling water does not show the least inclination to pull back. Higher life forms even develop feed-forward mechanisms: rather than first undergoing the effects of a certain behaviour before adapting it, they are capable of foreseeing its effect and of either aborting or pursuing the intended behaviour depending on the expected effect. Once you know enough about boiling water, you can foresee the effect of putting your hand into it, and adapt your behaviour accordingly so as to handle boiling water without letting it touch your skin. But dead entities do not have these capacities of adapting to feed-back or feed-forward information. A glass falling from the table does not foresee the effect and does not try to avoid it; even after having fallen to pieces and being glued together again, it will still not do anything to avoid falling next time. Dead entities don't learn.

Going by this criterion, both Gandhi and the Sangh have always been quite dead. In the Khilafat movement, Gandhi bent over backwards to please the Muslim leadership, he gave them a blank cheque, yet they didn't show any gratitude or sympathy, but rather intensified their anti-national commitments and their political separatism. His attempt to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity by means of all-out appeasement was a dismal failure. Yet, he kept on repeating the same approach for twenty-five years, and even after this had yielded Partition, he still kept on repeating it. There is no indication that he ever did any introspection to correct this disastrous policy on the basis of the feedback which he was receiving from reality. Once he had embarked on this course, he simply continued in the same orbit like any dead object in space subject to the law of inertia. Similarly, the Sangh is not learning from its experiences. For example, to reassure its bonafide critics (e.g. foreign journalists who are not part of the secularist coterie but have interiorized its misinformation for lack of anything better) about the bogey of "Hindu fundamentalism", RSS and BJP spokesmen always plead that "a Hindu state cannot be anti-secular, it is a contradiction in terms" or that "Hinduism and theocracy cannot co-exist".[4] They have been saying this for decades

and keep on repeating it quite placidly, but to my knowledge, they have never ever checked whether the message actually came across.

As labels go, it would not be unfair to describe the Arya Samaj as "Veda fundamentalists", or Swami Karpatri and the Puri Shankaracharya as "Manuwadi fundamentalists", so India-watchers may have a point when they do conceive of the notion of "Hindu fundamentalism". The RSS is certainly not a fundamentalist movement, is definitely not working for a Scripture-based law system, but the simplistic argumentation usually given, viz. that its being Hindu by itself excludes the possibility of fundamentalism, is just not the right one. At any rate, nobody seems ever to have changed his mind under the influence of this plea. The worst part of it is not that it fails to convince anyone, but that the Hindutva spokesmen have never even bothered to register this fact, much less to draw any practical conclusions from it.

[1] Gandhi's definition that "every good man is a Hindu" is a related example of Gandhi's propensity to replace the intellectual subtleties inevitable in a proper definition of something as complex as Hinduism with vulgar sentimentalism and simplistic moralism. It also happens to be incorrect, e.g. Confucius was a good man but not a Hindu by any definition, while Ravana and Duryodhana were Hindus by any definition even though they are remembered as incarnations of evil.

[2] Organiser, 6/10/1996; emphasis added.

[3] Remark that the expression avoids the term "Hindu" (in contrast with Respect Hindu sentiments, the subtitle of the VHP's "Hindu agenda" issued before the 1996 Lok Sabha election campaign). In his *The Concept of Hindu Nation* (p.2), Abhas Chatterjee relates how a "prominent political personage regarded by most people as a champion of Hindu Rashtra" (meaning L.K. Advani) prohibited an enthusiastic audience from raising the slogan: "He alone will rule this country who stands by the Hindu cause", and wanted the latter expression replaced with "the nation's cause".

[4] Rama Jois: *Supreme Court Judgment on 'Hindutva'* (Suruchi Prakashan 1996), p.63.

# 9. The Sangh as dinosaur

The anti-intellectualism of the Sangh Parivar is a sufficiently serious problem to warrant a closer discussion. The situation on the ground is that RSS men seldom sit down to do any thinking, but are always on the move. As a US-based Hindutva activist told me: "When I make a phone call to an RSS office-bearer in India, he will most often not be in the Delhi office, not in Nagpur or another town, but somewhere on the way." And the wife of a BJP stalwart told me: "Being on the way from one place to another is a status symbol among RSS men." With all this physical locomotion, little time and occasion is left for concentrated mental work.

The Sangh has a basic commitment to India and to Hindu culture, but beyond that, its ideological position is hazy and undeveloped, and therefore malleable in the hands of ideologically more articulate forces. It has been more influenced by dominant political currents and intellectual fashions, often emanating from its declared enemies, than one would expect from an "extremist" movement. Like in the Congress and Janata parties, quarrels within the BJP are never about ideology. As ex-insider Balraj Madhok writes in a comment on the Gujarat quarrels: "Personal differences rather than ideological factors lie at the root of the rifts within the Sangh Parivar." [1]

To an extent, the BJP has its lack of ideological sophistication in common with all non-Communist parties, most of all with Congress. A few recycled old slogans, a picture of its long-dead leaders, some material presents for the voter (ad hoc food subsidies, writing off farmers' loans), and there you have a complete Congress election campaign. Mutatis mutandis, the same is true for most parties. The simple slogans on the outside are not the summary of a profound and complicated programme too esoteric to trouble the voters with (as in the case of the Communists). The surface is all there is to it, at least as far as ideology is concerned.

This ideological hollowness is merely the application to politics of a more general superficiality afflicting India's public discourse. An example is the politics of Sikh identity: given the Vaishnava contents of Sikh scripture and the unmistakable Hindu self-identification by Sikh leaders from Guru Nanak through Guru Tegh Bahadur and Maharaja Ranjit Singh down to Master Tara Singh (a co-founder of the VHP), the "separate identity" in which radical neo-Sikhs have invested so much, including political separatism and a long decade of bloodshed, amounts to nothing more than beards, turbans and steel bangles,-- pure externality, an insult to the human intellect. [2]

Sri Aurobindo, the Freedom Fighter and philosopher, already said it: "I believe that the main cause of India's weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor a lack of spirituality or Dharma, but a diminution of thought-power, the spread of ignorance in the motherland of Knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think -- incapacity of thought or 'thought phobia'." [3] The great ailment of India today is the decline in thinking power. The crudeness of contemporary political thought in India, once the cradle of great pioneers in abstract and social sciences, is a sad sight, especially considering that in other fields, such as business and the exact sciences, Indians are already recovering their ancient greatness and showing their acumen again.

To this general atmosphere of intellectual sloppiness, the RSS has contributed its own wilful anti-intellectual prejudice. The perception from which Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (RSS supremo 1925-40) started his RSS project was that Hindu society essentially had everything, even the best of everything, certainly also in intellectual culture, and that the only thing it lacked was organization. It is debatable whether lack of organization was a factor in the historical defeat of Hindu princes by Muslim invaders and British colonizers, but for the interbellum period, this analysis possibly had its merits. And so, the RSS put all its eggs in the single basket labelled Hindu sangathan/"organization" (hence its weekly's name Organiser).

Hedgewar's successor Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1940-73) despised intellectual pursuits, and when he saw RSS people reading books or newspapers, he would ask them if they had "nothing useful to do for the Sangh?" When I mention this to RSS activists, they protest that there are many doctors, engineers and scientists in the RSS, and some of them recount as their personal experience that Golwalkar had encouraged them in their studies. Alright then, let me rephrase my position as follows.

Golwalkar, who had been trained as a biologist, shared with many people from the exact sciences a dismissive incomprehension for the humanities, the disciplines in which critical thinking is practised. Secondly, he shared with many spiritual-minded people a skepticism of the power of the intellect as compared to that of supposedly deeper layers of consciousness. Thirdly, he shared with many activists a distrust of sterile cerebration with its tendency to paralyze people's power to act. And fourthly, he shared with many Hindus a disgust with the traitorous role of the Communists, intellectuals all of them, in the British suppression of the 1942 Quit India movement and the Partition of India. Hence the rhetorical question of many RSS people: "What good was ever done by intellectuals?"

RSS people often tell the story of the Pandit who crosses the river and asks the boatman if he ever studied philosophy: "No? Then half your life is wasted!" But when the boat starts to sink, it is the boatman's turn: "Panditji, have you studied swimming? No? Then all your life is wasted!" And then they have a good laugh, satisfied at having proven how useless intellectual effort is. But fact is: in the modern world, the equivalent of "swimming" in the story, the skill necessary to disentangle yourself from the impasse and reach the goal, is not the physical locomotion at which RSS officials are so good. Among the skills needed for successful social and political action today, we should include the art of collecting and analyzing information, and the art of formulating and advertising viewpoints. Not the intellectuals, but the RSS itself acts like the pandit in the story who had spurned mastering the art of swimming.

In fairness, it must be conceded that for all its anti-intellectual bias, through its dedicated investment in grass-roots work involving enormous personal effort of several millions of people, the Sangh Parivar has unmistakably succeeded in establishing an impressive presence among the common people. Also, it must be said that some RSS leaders, particularly its new sar-sangh-chalak, Prof. Rajendra Singh (1994--), successor of Balasaheb Deoras (1973-94), have understood the folly of

this anti-intellectual prejudice, and now exhort their workers to do some reading. The newer publications are also less shabby-looking and better written than the handful of pamphlets which constitutes the whole of RSS literature produced in the first seventy years. In particular, the *Organiser* has definitely gained in informative reliability and intellectual depth under Seshadri Chari's editorship. In the margin of Sangh, some local groups have started to process information and disseminate ideas, such as the Vigil group in Chennai and the Hindu Vivek Kendra in Mumbai. But the consequences of this long-standing policy of mindless activism are bound to run their course for some more years.

The Sangh's wilful mindlessness reminds me of a Chinese story about a man who equipped himself for a journey to the south. He bought the best chariot and horses, hired the best charioteer, and went to the imperial highway which crossed the empire in north-south direction. There, he gave directions to his charioteer, and off they went. At a stop along the way, someone asked him where he was going. "To the south", he said. "But this way you will never get there", said the stranger. The man replied: "Come on, how can you say I will not get there? This is the best road in the empire, why should it not take me there?" But the stranger said: "You will not get there, because you are taking the direction to the north." The man insisted: "But these are the finest horses, and this is a brand-new chariot, most certainly they will get me there." The stranger said: "But they will not get you to the south if you take this direction." The traveller got tired of all this nit-picking: "My charioteer is the best in the empire, so how can you say that he will not get me to my destination? Look, this is a sterile discussion, I must be on my way." And off he drove, on the best road, with the best equipment, at full speed, yet he never reached his destination.

Indeed, when you ask RSS office-bearers to evaluate their own performance, they will boast that they have such a neat scheme of character-building, such a fine organization, so many well-trained and dedicated cadres, such a wide range of activities and front groups. Alright, but where is this impressive organizational machinery going? Do they know enough about Hinduism to understand why it should be defended in the first place? The standard shakha teachings about "patriotism" may fail to teach them much about the specific qualities of Hinduism. Do they know enough about Hinduism's enemies to defeat or even simply to recognize them? Without a proper analysis, this vast network of shakhas and front organizations is but an army of sleepwalkers.

I propose to conclude with another metaphor, which came up during a discussion I had with Dina Nath Mishra, a journalist close to the RSS: "The RSS is a big dinosaur with a small brain." I don't think I misrepresent Mishra's opinion when I say he agreed with this remark. His practical conclusion was: the thing to do is not to build up an alternative organization, but to "infuse some brain into the dinosaur".

[1] B. Madhok: "A Question of Power", *Indian Express*, 29 October 1995.

[2] The desire to fill up the doctrinal emptiness of non-Hindu neo-Sikhism has led to the superficial adoption of British secular or Christian viewpoints (from anti-Brahminism to the Protestant doctrinal slogan of "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men", quoted by Khushwant Singh as the essence of Sikhism) and the redefining of Sikh concepts after an Islamic model, e.g. the ten



Gurus as prophets, the Granth as "revealed scripture", the hukumnama as fatwa, the dharm yuddh as jihad.

[3] Spoken in April 1920; quoted in Abhas Chatterjee: Concept of Hindu Nation, p.67.

# 10. Anti-intellectualism in action

The two most important consequences of the anti-intellectual prejudice animating the Sangh are, firstly, an extreme ineptness at public relations, and secondly, the stunted development of the Sangh Parivar's own intellectual grip on the world. An example of the first is the staggering failure of the Hindu campaign reclaiming Ayodhya to communicate its case to the world, as already discussed. The worst part of it is not that the Sangh people failed to communicate the Hindu case (the biased press was indeed a formidable obstacle), but that it never took the trouble of verifying whether its message came across nor of devising ways to deal with the hostile climate in the media and among India-watchers.

Another example is riot reporting. Riots, though mostly started by Muslims (e.g. the Mumbai riots of December 1992 and of January 1993), are systematically reported in the world media as "pogroms" committed by well-prepared and well-armed Hindu death squads against poor defenceless Muslims. In journalistic and scholarly references, Advani's peaceful 1990 Rath Yatra has become a proverbially violent "blood yatra". Unlike Asghar Ali Engineer and other riot vultures, the Sangh does not bother to write its own reports on riots, in spite of its boast that its cadres are omnipresent. Quite often, Sangh-related people tell me interesting and potentially explosive background stories about riots (and other controversial matters such as discrimination of Hindus, connivance at Bangladeshi infiltration etc.), but when I ask them for exact names, times, places, it usually turns out that they have not bothered to record anything: what would have become a credible-sounding propaganda story in the hands of A.A. Engineer remains a rumour headed for oblivion in the hands of Sangh people.

The lie about "pogroms" is giving a bad name not only to the organized Hindutva forces, but to Hindu society as a whole and to India as well; for that reason, the Sangh Parivar has no right to neglect the public relations job inherent in any socio-political movement. Until a decade ago, most observers and even enemies of Hinduism were prepared to concede to it a certain harmlessness and benevolent tolerance as quintessentially Hindu qualities; today, even that little credit has been taken away. Hindus used to take great pride in Swami Vivekananda's triumphal speech at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, but the celebration of its 100th anniversary in Washington DC was just embarrassing because the Ayodhya demolition was generally considered to have disproven Vivekananda's description of Hinduism as tolerant. Hinduism is now never discussed without mentioning the existence of "Hindu fundamentalism", at best to disclaim this phenomenon as part of genuine Hinduism, but more often to prove that Hinduism is just as conducive to fanaticism as Islam and Christianity are. The credit for this additional blot on the fair name of Hinduism must go to the Sangh Parivar, not because it has taken up Hindu causes like Ayodhya, but because it has handled them in such a mindless way.

We may compare this with the performance of the Bosnian Serbs, as contrasted with that of the Bosnian Muslims. Without pronouncing an opinion on the rights and wrongs of the Yugoslav conflict, we may notice a few pertinent facts about the strengths and weaknesses of the warring

parties. The Serb/Yugoslav army started in a very comfortable position, and easily established control in up to 73% of the territory; the Muslim separatist government in Sarajevo found itself defenceless after hopelessly overplaying its hand by declaring independence, but the Sarajevo underworld provided the arms and expertise to save at least the capital and turn it into a base for the reconquest of Bosnia. From that point onwards, the bragging drunkards on the Serb side squandered their winning position step by step, while the sober and determined Muslims made the most of their limited strength.

A crucial factor in this war (admittedly more decisive in a small country than in India) was world opinion. The Serbs squandered any goodwill they might have enjoyed, along with a lot of their ammunition, in useless and ugly-looking actions against civilians and unimportant targets, e.g. by bombing the museum city of Dubrovnik in a part of Croatia which they had no intention to conquer. The Muslims, by contrast, fully exploited their underdog position in winning international sympathy, and also hired the services of two American public-relations firms. We all know the results: the American government willingly violated international agreements and its own laws by helping Iran in shipping weapons and guerrilla fighters to Bosnia, the CIA trained Bosnian soldiers, NATO air power destroyed the Serb frontline, the Bosnian army helped by the Croats reconquered one-third of the Serb-held territory, and the Dayton agreement formally restored the political unity of Bosnia, definitively refusing recognition to the Republika Srpska, all with the approval of remainder-Yugoslavia. The Serbs lost the war exclusively by their mindlessness.

The most serious consequence of the Sangh's tradition of mindless activism is the second one, the lack of a developed intellectual perspective on the Indian and world situations. In their political analysis, Hindutva activists often use the categories developed by their enemies, and are the prisoners of these categories. E.g., first they let their enemies lay down the norm of secularism, and then they try to live up to this norm and prove that they are better secularists than others (hence BJP "positive secularism" vs. Nehruvian "pseudo-secularism"). This way, they constantly have to betray their own political identity and try to fashion themselves a new ("genuinely secular") identity which their enemies have defined but are not willing to concede to them.

Sadly, this is common Hindu practice in the modern age. Thus, the Christian and Muslim emphasis on monotheism and condemnation of polytheism has been interiorized by Hindu reform movements even as the latter were trying to counter Christian power in India. Instead of defending Hindu polytheism against the missionary vilification of "idolatry", the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj movements claimed that monotheism was indeed right and polytheism was indeed wrong, but that Hinduism, properly understood, is more monotheist than Christianity and Islam. As the historian Shrikant Talageri has remarked, this is as if an Indian were to say: "The colonial racists were correct in assuming the superiority of white skins over brown skins, but Indians have whiter skins than Europeans."

Such hopeless exercises in trying to defeat an opponent after first borrowing his thought categories and value judgments, are understandable as a result of the inferior position in which Hindu society has found itself for centuries, always trying to live up to standards set by their victorious enemies. In an inertial hold-over of this psychology, today's Hindutva activists have an inferiority complex and

value nothing so much as being accepted by respected people, meaning secularists. That is why they always offer their platforms to people who despise them, people like Inder Kumar Gujral and Khushwant Singh (to name two whom I've seen scheduled as guests of honour at functions of the RSS student organization Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad), at the same time spurning staunch Hindus who ought to be their allies but who have been ostracized by the secularist establishment.

This approach is, of course, totally counterproductive, and if the Hindutva strategists had it in them to learn from the feedback they get from reality, they would have given it up long ago and opted for a bolder profile. That this would be more successful, was briefly illustrated at the height of the Ayodhya controversy. Sensing that the public mood was in favour of the Hindu claim to the disputed temple site, and more generally of some form of affirmation of India's Hindu identity, the secularists temporarily borrowed the categories from their opponents and started preaching secularism in the name of Hinduism: "True Hinduism doesn't fuss about mosques", "Rama himself would not have approved of this quarrel over his temple", "Swami Vivekananda was a secularist too", etc. Suddenly, the tables were turned, Hinduism had become respectable, just because in spite of themselves, the Hindu leaders had been bold and defiant for once.

But the BJP leadership has definitely not learned from this experience. During the 1996 election campaign, and during the 13-day tenure of the first-ever BJP Government, A.B. Vajpayee and other BJP leaders were crawling before the secularist opinion masters and pleading that they were the most secularist of all. It recalls the occasion in 1771 when the Peshwa general Mahadji Scindia, militarily the most powerful man in India, prostrated before Moghul emperor Shah Alam whom he had rescued from his Pathan rivals, instead of folding up the decrepit Moghul empire and declaring Hindu Rashtra. The Hindutva forces, instead of seizing power in their own right and setting up an avowedly Hindu dispensation, keep on crawling before people whom the Organiser bravely derides as "forces of the past".

I expect Sangh spokesmen to reject this comparison with the argument that unlike Sindia's, the Vajpayee government's power position was severely restricted, as it controlled only a minority in the Lok Sabha. Fair enough: in the circumstances, the BJP had to tread carefully, and would have done its duty by just remaining in power without rocking the boat, if only to break the hysteria about the "threat of Hindu fundamentalism". But the point for now is that a review of past experience would have taught Vajpayee that "more secular than thou" posturing had no chance at all of making any dent in the secularist hate front against the BJP. Hindu society would accept concessions by a BJP government, on condition that there was a realistic promise of obtaining certain real gains in return. Only a fool could have believed that crawling before the secularists would yield any, but just any reciprocal gesture. They are, after all, spoiled children, and the sight of beggars merely makes them laugh.[1]

[1] Moreover, I cannot accept the explanation frequently given by BJP men, that the BJP cannot do anything until it comes to power at the centre. A party with a distinct ideological identity would certainly give at least a foretaste of its future achievements through its parliamentary work and through the performance of its state governments; but the record shows (cfr. *infra*) that the BJP has

performed as at most a second Congress Party, less corrupt at best, but hardly more alert to specifically Hindu concerns.

# 11. "I am a Hindu communalist"

A symptom of the ideological power equation is the Sangh Parivar's permanent checkmate in the "war of the words". The Sangh is at the mercy of the meanings which its enemies allot to important terms, such as "communalism".

Originally (at least in Indian politics), "communal" was the term by which the British labelled political arrangements, such as separate electorates and quota-based recruitment, which took the religious community as the operative unit rather than the individual or the family or the region or the nation. The term was never hurled at people who rejected these arrangements, but was quite sincerely accepted by the people who proposed the "communalization" of the polity: the British and the Muslim League advocated it openly, the Congress started defending it after becoming a party to it through the Lucknow Pact (1916). When the British proposed the Communal Award, its beneficiaries never thought of treating "communal" as a dirty word and throwing it at the Communal Award's opponents. Today, by contrast, the mores of discourse have sunk to the level where politicians and journalists and scholars systematically apply the term to a movement which never used it as a description of its own positions.

Though Gandhi opposed the extension of the communal principle to the relations between caste Hindus and untouchable Hindus, for the rest his whole negotiation policy with the League and the British was situated within the framework of communalism. The main opposition to this unapologetic communalism came not from the Congress, but from the Hindu Mahasabha with, in its shadow, the fledgling Sangh. If you read speeches by HMS leaders in the 1930s and 40s, they turn out to be full of unselfconscious attacks on "communal" politics. The Hindutva movement was born in the struggle against communalism that was its very *raison d'être*. The HMS's stated programme was to abolish communalism and make India a secular democracy without separate electorates and recruitment by communal quota. Congress, with its bad conscience about its complicity in the communalization of the polity, tried to cloud the debate by misapplying the term "communal" to the HMS on the analogy of the Muslim League. It falsely posited a symmetry between the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, smuggling out of the public's perception the antisymmetry between the League's adherence and the HMS's opposition to the communal principle.[1] Very quickly, accurate usage was eclipsed by muddled usage.

Today, the label "communal" is like a millstone around the Hindutva movement's neck. If the Nehruvians who installed and still support a separate Personal Law for Muslims, a "communal" arrangement par excellence, can get away with labelling their very opponents "communalists", we have to admit that they have proven themselves past masters in the war of the words; it is no use opposing them. The Sangh has lost this battle decades ago, but has never mustered the energy and the brain power to even face its defeat squarely, much less to think up a way to turn the tables on the Nehruvian Newspeak brigade. It merely tries to run away from the label with ridiculous disclaimers ("Hindus can never be communal") which themselves presuppose the distorted meaning imposed on this innocent word by the Nehruvians.

The best way out of this impasse is to accept the label and give it a new meaning. And I am not proposing yet another distortion to counter the Nehruvian distortion, no, the new meaning should simply be the word's true and original meaning. Before the British introduced "communal" electorates and "communal" recruiting, the term had an entirely positive meaning. It has to do with living together, with mutual support, with transcending petty divisions, with strengthening community life, beautiful.[2] The Oxford Dictionary (1986 reprint) defines communal as "of or for the or a community, for the common use". It also has an entry communalism, defined as "principle of communal organization of society", and calls the Paris Commune a "communalistic government in Paris in 1871". Indian journalists going abroad find to their initial disbelief that no one in the West or anywhere else ever uses or even understands this swearword "communalist"; if asked for a guess, few non-Indians would opine that the word might have a pejorative meaning. The magic charm "communalism" which puts the whole Indian political scene in a mood of graveness and militancy, and which can paralyze all normal thought processes in BJP circles, is nothing but a provincial and distorted usage exclusive to India's English-speaking elite.

The Sangh people, after having been battered and beaten for decades on the words front, should finally accept the challenge and hit back. Instead of swallowing this distorted meaning of the word "communal" and trying to prove that it doesn't apply to themselves, they ought to accept the word and reject the distortion. They should restore to the word its true meaning and then allot it to those who are already stuck with it anyway -- themselves. The only way to stop being chased around with salvos of "communalists!" is to rename the BJP as Communalist Party. Every Hindu leader should make it a point to tell interviewers: "I am a Hindu communalist." Wage the war of the words, and win!

[1] This false symmetry is still propagated by the likes of Mani Shankar Aiyar, who once called the BJP the "Hindu chapter of the Muslim League".

[2] Karl Marx tapped from the same source when he associated his own ideology of self-righteousness and mass-murder with this string of community-related ideas through the term communism. We should redeem the much-abused word family of community by reintroducing it through a new derivative with a genuinely positive meaning.

# 12. Vulgar nationalism

A consequence of this lack of self-developed understanding of the forces in the field is that the Sangh is not able to discern objective allies and enemies on the world stage, so that it is unable to make friends. E.g., after liberalization and globalization became hot items, the Sangh Parivar including the BJP has been multiplying and intensifying its attacks on the USA. Time and again, Hindutva spokesmen have been presenting the impersonal process of globalization as an American ploy to take over the world (just as Westerners once depicted earlier developments in capitalism as Jewish conspiracies to dispossess the workers and smallholders). Much of their anti-Americanism could have been borrowed quite literally from Leftist pamphlets of yesteryear, some of it also from Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches; the only thing missing is the "Great Satan" label. Meanwhile, these Hindutva exegetes of the globalization conspiracy have not even bothered to notice that in the USA itself, globalization is being criticized both from the Left and the Right. This movement spurns its potential friends.

A similarly misguided exercise consists in blaming first the British and now the Americans for Hindu society's problems with Islam. Like the secularists, Hindutva authors systematically exaggerate the British role in the Partition of India. The simple truth is that the British merely made deals with an Islamic separatism which was very much there before their arrival, and which is intrinsic to Islam. We can understand that the secularists refuse to face this fact, but in the case of Hindutva spokesmen, this refusal smacks of cowardice.

Instead of blaming Islam for Pakistani aggression, a whole lot is made of the American arms which Pakistan is using during this aggression; as if it is not the Pakistanis themselves who have chosen to buy and use these weapons. Instead of focusing on ideological forces, the blame is put on a country; in this respect, the creation of Pakistan comes in handy, because instead of blaming Muslim fellow-countrymen for riots and bomb attacks and Kashmiri separatism, one can now blame "foreign agents". And when Pakistan feels too close for comfort, the blame can be shifted to a more distant country, like Britain or the USA. This demonization of a nation may be excusable in wartime fever (though it is itself a major cause of wars), but it is definitely below the dignity of a columnist commenting on world events from his armchair. Wherever we look in Sangh thinking, we constantly run into this reduction of ideological problems to tribal conflicts between "national" and "foreign" or "anti-national" forces. What is painfully missing is a keen eye for potentially friendly trends across the borders, such as the increasing awareness in US foreign policy circles that India is the West's natural ally against the anti-democratic regimes in Asia.[1]

Equally painful is the absence of any serious understanding about Communism, a key player on the Indian and world stages during most of the Sangh's history. Communist critics of Hindutva take it for granted that the Sangh is anti-Communist, but a perusal of Sangh publications does not support this common belief. Thus, BJP economist Jay Dubashi, though formerly a staunch critic of Soviet and Indian Communism, has actually blamed the CIA for the break-up of the Soviet Union, a conspiracy theory which is highly unjust to the freedom-loving sections of the former Soviet



empire's population and incredibly unmindful of the self-inflicted economic breakdown which forced the Soviet leaders into perestroika.[2] Any retrospective references to the Korea war, a UNO mission to save South Korea from Communist aggression, routinely describe it as a case of American aggression. Likewise, references to the Vietnam war ignore the fact that the Americans merely intervened in an ongoing intra-Vietnamese war triggered by Communist aggression; it may be true that the Americans misunderstood Vietnamese nationalism (a non-Communist factor of opposition to the American intervention), but the fact that their motive was the containment of Communism should not be overlooked.

All through the Cold War, the BJS/BJP never once developed a global vision of the Communist problem. The only BJP publication on Communism, the 24-page pamphlet *The Great Betrayers* by Krishna Lal Sharma (ca.1988), devoted to a critique of the Indian Communist Parties, merely points out the Communists' extra-territorial loyalties and their "misunderstanding" of nationalism. Sharma argues convincingly that the Communists do not accept Indian nationhood, and that whenever it suits their purposes, they will twist nationalist discourse to promote "Bengali nationhood" or "Keralite nationhood". Indian Communists are attacked for being "anti-national", which is a correct allegation but hardly the whole story of what is wrong with Communism.

For anyone who has met victims of Communism, it is simply shocking to read what some spokesmen of the (allegedly anti-Communist) Hindutva movement have to say about it. In the spring of 1996, after the Cuban Army shot down two airplanes of Miami-based Cubans trying to help Cuban boat refugees, and after China fired some shots in the direction of Taiwan in order to intimidate the Taiwanese voters, *Organiser* columnist and former *Illustrated Weekly of India* editor M.V. Kamath wrote the following: "The United States has a unique record of grave errors in the last fifty years (...) It tried to prop up Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa and allotted the Chinese Permanent Membership in the Security Council to his government.(...) It got into the Korean War and sacrificed the lives of thousands of its young men in pursuit of a futile mission to contain Communism.(...) The latest example is its support to Cuban terrorists making illegal flights over Cuban air space, a brazen example of international lawlessness (...) But nothing fazes the United States which seems determined to break any law, commit any crime for its own selfish ends." [3] This outburst of crude and obnoxious anti-Americanism calls for some comment.

The American (in fact UNO) intervention in Korea was not a "futile attempt to contain Communism". It was a rescue mission rendered necessary by Stalin's unilateral aggression against South Korea, not by any interventionist whim of the USA; and it was relatively successful, in that it achieved its stated goal of freeing South Korea and called a temporary halt to Communist expansionism.[4] The alternative to saving South Korea would have been what India did to Tibet at the very same time: when Mao's troops invaded, India treacherously refused help. Kamath, who is hailed as a veteran journalist in the *Sangh Parivar* did not know or ignored the fact that in 1950 India had voted for the UN resolution for resisting Communist aggression in Korea and sent a medical mission as India's contribution to the Allied effort. Kamath calls American policy "selfish" (ignoring that in the US, interventionism has always been criticized by isolationists who argue that their country should be more selfish rather than help other countries out of trouble), but India's policy vis-à-vis Communist aggression in Tibet was worse than selfish: rather than helping a friend

and buffer state, it preferred to damage its own interests by exposing its own borders to Mao's armies. At the time, Nehru's despicable China policy was criticized by the Hindutva circles, but it seems they have changed their minds.

Communist expansionism was at its peak, and if the American-led defence of South Korea had not cooled Communist cockiness a bit, India would have been the next target (an armed Communist uprising had already started in India in 1949). Without the rescue mission to Korea, and more generally without the limitations clamped on the Communist powers by NATO vigilance, China would not have retreated after its successful invasion of India in 1962, and most RSS men would have breathed their last in Mao-cum-Namboodiripad's concentration camps. When China invaded India in 1962, Communist expansionism was already hampered by Soviet-Chinese hostility; even then, India had to turn to the USA for help.

The Chinese membership of the Security Council was not "allotted" to Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China (RoC) by whimsical Americans, as Kamath claims; the RoC held that seat by virtue of being one of the victorious powers of World War 2 and a founding member of the UNO. As for the free Cubans whose unarmed planes were shot down by Cuban Communists in international air space when they were searching for boat refugees to help, it is simply disgusting that Kamath calls them "terrorists". When RSS spokesmen themselves dole out this label so carelessly, why do they complain when the RSS is blacklisted by the ill-informed security forces of some Western countries as a "terrorist organization"?

Kamath ascribes American policies to the "white racist supremacists who make policy in Washington".[5] He does not make clear how this profoundly sinister motive explains the preference of American officials (some of whom are black) for brown Pakistanis over brown Indians. Mr. Kamath's allegations are in no way different from those uttered in petty Leftist pamphlets. Those who were under the impression that the RSS counted itself among the anti-Communist forces, should realize that without too much exaggeration, RSS' anti-Communism can fairly be described as a notion invented by the Communists themselves.

How can an otherwise capable intellectual like Mr. Kamath stoop to this vulgar demonization of a foreign country? Mindless "patriotism", known to be the refuge of scoundrels, reduces complex issues to a question of "national" versus "foreign", rather than analyzing the ideological forces in the field. Pretending that problems are essentially non-existent (e.g. Hindu-Muslim hostility), or otherwise at least very simple (viz. due to the evil foreign hand): that has become the focus of Hindutva casuistry.

Though the BJS used to support the RoC on Taiwan against Communist China, the state with the Laogai slave labour camps, now M.V. Kamath in Organiser supports China's right to take Taiwan by force. To him, this is merely a matter of "national unity" and thwarting "American designs" to keep China divided, as if he had never heard of the intra-Chinese civil war between opposing ideologies which has created the present division of China (the only American crime in this intra-Chinese conflict was that at the critical moment, military aid to Chiang Kai-shek's legitimate Government was cut off).[6] Kamath's hateful jibes against the RoC are representative of a

tendency within the BJP which concedes Beijing's right to annex Taiwan, the last toehold of the legitimate RoC, by force.[7] Here, the BJP has thrown all considerations of principle overboard, and settled for Realpolitik vis-à-vis big China and little Taiwan.

Or rather, it is worse than Realpolitik, it is the product of a grave political aberration. Any ideological consideration seems to have been discarded in favour of a monomaniacal concern for "national unity": better the whole of China under Communist rule than to allow a foothold to the freedom-loving Chinese at the price of a temporary division. The Sangh simply refuses to study the problem of Communism except in terms of the Indian Communists' extraterritorial loyalties. This is a very crude and narrow-minded type of nationalism. One wonders why the Sangh rejects the Jamaat-I-Islami's offer of a United India under Islam.

[1] It is a different matter that many Hindutva spokesmen fantasize aloud about a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, in which they expect the West will take care of Islam and relieve the Hindus from the burden of facing Islam themselves.

[2] Jay Dubashi: "We don't need foreigners to destroy us", *Organiser*, 18/2/1996.

[3] M.V. Kamath: "A Myopic Policy", *Organiser*, 14 April 1996; emphasis added. Remark that while the US never committed any massacre of Hindus, and while Islam has killed millions of Hindus, Kamath nor the *Organiser* have ever used such strong language about Islam.

[4] As any student of history could tell the BJP "anti-Communists", the only mistake which President Truman made, was that he did not allow General Douglas Mc Arthur to bomb the bases and supply lines of the Chinese "volunteers", in which case the UNO forces might have completed their success by securing the liberation of Communist-occupied North Korea.

[5] M.V. Kamath: "The US threat to India", *Organiser*, 19 May 1996. One wonders how the so-called "angry white males" would feel about this, the people in the US who feel that their federal government is, on the contrary, biased against whites.

[6] M.V. Kamath: "The Question of Taiwan", *Organiser*, 7 April 1996.

[7] Though I have not found this confirmed in an official BJP document, this acceptance of Communist China's right to annex the Republic of China is also the BJP's position, according to two members of the BJP's Foreign Policy Cell.

# 13. Hindutva and other peoples' nationalism

The BJP's subordination of any and every ideological or religious conflict to questions of "national unity and integrity", this most mindless form of territorial nationalism, is also a worrying retreat from the historical Hindu conception of Indian nationhood and its implications for the evaluation of foreign problems of national unity. Along with Mahatma Gandhi and other Freedom Fighters, the BJS used to be convinced that India was a self-conscious civilizational unit since several thousands of years, strengthened in its realization of unity by the Sanskrit language, the Brahmin caste, the pilgrimage cycles which brought pilgrims from every part of India all around the country ("country" rather than the "Subcontinent" or "South Asia", terms which intrinsically question this unity), and other socio-cultural factors of national integration. The notions that India was an artificial creation of the British and a "nation in the making", were floated by the British themselves and by Jawaharlal Nehru, respectively, and both are obvious cases of unfounded self-flattery. Gandhi's and the BJS's viewpoint that India is an ancient nation conscious of its own unity is historically more accurate.

In foreign policy, one can expect two opposite attitudes to follow from these two conceptions of India, the Gandhian one which derives India's political unity from a pre-existent cultural unity, and the Nehruvian one which denies this cultural unity and sees political unity as a baseless coincidence, an artificial creation of external historical forces. In its own self-interest, an artificially created state devoid of underlying legitimacy tends to support any and every other state, regardless of whether that state is the political embodiment of a popular will or a cultural coherence. The reason is that any successful separatism at the expense of a fellow artificial state is a threat to the state's own legitimacy. That is, for instance, why the founding member states of the Organization of African Unity decided from the outset that the ethnically absurd colonial borders were not to be altered. It is also why countries like Great Britain and France, whose own legitimacy within their present borders is questioned by their Irish, Corsican and other minorities, were reluctant to give diplomatic recognition to Lithuania when it broke away from the Soviet Union.

By contrast, those who believe that states are merely political instruments in the service of existing ethnic or cultural units, accept that state structures and borders are not sacrosanct in themselves, and that they may consequently be altered. That is why Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn proposed to allow the non-Slavic republics to leave the Soviet Union, and why as a sterling Russian patriot he pleaded in favour of Chechen independence from the Russian Federation: it is no use trying to keep Turks and Slavs, or Chechens and Russians, under one roof against their will. If Russia is meant to be the political expression of the collective will of the Russian people, it is only harmful to include other nations by force, as the Chechens and Turkic peoples once were.

To be sure, even partisans of this concept of "meaningful" (as opposed to arbitrary) states will

concede that there may be limitations to this project of adjusting state structures and state borders to existing ethnic and cultural realities, especially where coherent communities have been ripped apart and relocated, as has happened in Russia. Also, cultural and ethnic identities are not static givens (e.g. the "Muslim" character of India's principal minority), so we should not oversimplify the question to an idyllic picture of a permanent division of the world in states allotted to God-given national entities. But at least the general principle can be accepted: states should as much as possible be the embodiment of coherent cultural units. That, at any rate, is the Hindu-nationalist understanding of the Indian state: as the political embodiment of Hindu civilization.

Now, what is the position of the BJS/BJP regarding the right of a state to self-preservation as against the aspirations of ethnic-cultural communities or nations? The BJS originally had no problem supporting separatism in certain specific cases, esp. the liberation of East Turkestan (Sinkiang/Xinjiang), Inner Mongolia and Tibet from Chinese rule. At the time, the BJS still adhered to the Gandhian position: India should be one independent state because it is one culturally, and so should Tibet for the same reason. Meanwhile, however, this plank in its platform has been quietly withdrawn.

As A.B. Vajpayee told the Chinese when he was Janata Party Foreign Minister, and as Brijesh Mishra, head of the BJP's Foreign Policy Cell, reconfirmed to me (February 1996): India, including the BJP, considers Tibet and other ethnic territories in the People's Republic as inalienable parts of China.[1] The BJP has decisively shifted towards the Nehruvian position: every state, by virtue of its very existence, must be defended against separatist tendencies, no matter how well-founded the latter may be in cultural, ethnic or historical respects. That is, for example, why the BJP is not supporting Kurdish sovereignty against Iraqi and Turkish imperialism.[2] Along with falling from cultural Hindu nationalism to empty secular-territorial nationalism, the BJP has also fallen from solidarity with other oppressed and colonized nations to a short-sighted Indocentrism.

When you ask why the BJP has abandoned its support for the Tibetan freedom movement, the standard reply is that this would justify other separatisms, including those in Kashmir and Panjab. Exactly the same position is taken by non-BJP politicians and diplomats. But from a Hindu and from an Indian nationalist viewpoint, this position does injustice to India's claim on Kashmir and Panjab, which should not be put on a par with all other anti-separatism positions in the world. Firstly, while Tibet was never a part of China, and while Chechnya was only recently (19th century) forcibly annexed to Russia, Kashmir and Panjab have been part of the heartland of Hindu culture since at least 5,000 years. Secondly, in contrast with the annexations of Chechnya and Tibet, the accession of Punjab (including the nominally independent princedoms in it) and the whole of the former princedom of Jammu & Kashmir to the Republic of India were entirely legal, following procedures duly agreed upon by the parties concerned.

Therefore, Indian nationalists are harming their own case by equating Kashmiri separatism with independentism in Tibet, which did not accede to China of its own free will and following due procedure, and which was not historically a part of China. To equate Kashmir with Tibet or Chechnya is to deny the profound historical and cultural Indianness of Kashmir, and to undermine

India's case against Kashmiri separatism. Here again, we see the harmful effect of the BJP's intellectual sloppiness.

To be fair, we should mention that the party considers its own compromising position on Tibet as very clever and statesmanlike: now that it is preparing itself for Government, it is now already removing any obstacles in the way of its acceptance by China and the USA (who would both be irritated with the "destabilizing" impact of a Government in Delhi which is serious about challenging Beijing's annexation of Tibet). In reality, a clever statesman would reason the other way around: possibly there is no realistic scope for support to Tibetan independence, but then that can be conceded at the negotiation table, in exchange for real Chinese concessions, *quid pro quo*. [3] If you swallow your own hard positions beforehand, you will have nothing left to bargain with when you want to extract concessions on the other party's hard positions, i.e., China's territorial claims on Ladakh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, and its support to Burmese claims on the Andaman and Nicobar islands. International diplomacy should teach the BJP what it refuses to learn from its Indian experiences, viz. that being eager to please your enemies doesn't pay.

[1] If earlier BJP manifestoes still mentioned Sino-Indian cooperation "with due safeguards for Tibet", meaningless enough, the 1996 manifesto does not even mention Tibet. Nor does it unambiguously reclaim the China-occupied Indian territories; it vaguely settles for "resolv[ing] the border question in a fair and equitable manner". (p.32)

[2] In October 1996, a handful of BJP men bravely demonstrated before the American Embassy against the American retaliation to the Iraqi troops' entry in the Kurdish zone from which it was barred by the UNO. There was every reason to demonstrate: while punishing Iraq, the Americans allow Turkish aggression against Iraqi Kurdistan, the so-called "protected" zone, and fail to support Kurdish independence in deference to Turkey's objections. But that was not the target of the BJP protest, which merely opposed any and every threat against the "unity and integrity" of Iraq, a totally artificial state with artificial and unjustifiable borders (as Saddam Hussain himself argued during the Gulf War, pointing to the artificial British-imposed border between the Mesopotamian population centre and the Kuwaiti oil fields).

[3] This is not to suggest that demanding freedom for Tibet should only be done to have bargaining chip, merely to illustrate the principle that concessions, even if unavoidable under the circumstances, should still be made known as such, i.e. in exchange for concessions from the other party, and not made beforehand in exchange for nothing. But Beijing politics may develop in such a way that Tibetan sovereignty becomes a realistic proposition again.

# 14. The Sangh's Muslims

In criticizing the Sangh's simplistic anti-Americanism, I am not holding a brief for American foreign policy. The Organiser is entirely right in arguing that American officials are being extremely silly when they base their policies on the assumption that Pakistan is a bulwark against (rather than of) Islamic fundamentalism. But this mistake is hardly typically American: in Organiser itself, columnists play the same game of labelling Muslim entities, without asking their consent, as bulwarks against Islamic fanaticism.

Ever since he counselled Muslims to abandon their claim to the Ayodhya site, one Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is regularly presented in Organiser as an enlightened alternative to Islamic fanaticism.[1] He is also credited with admitting that most riots are started by Muslims. Yet, Wahiduddin Khan is an ideologue and leader of the Tabligh movement, the object of which is to "purify" Muslim culture of Hindu influence.[2] It is motivated by the same hostility to Hinduism as the Muslim League's Pakistan movement was. His endorsement of the Hindu claim on Ayodhya springs from the realization that the Muslim campaign for the islamization of the disputed site in Ayodhya (in use as a Hindu temple since 1949) has proven harmful to Muslim interests. Similarly, his chastising the Muslims for starting riots can perfectly be explained by the bad image which this gives them among Hindus, who are not fooled by the secularist lies about "pogroms", and are kept on the alert against Muslims. But the RSS, in its eagerness to find some kind of approval in the enemy camp, wilfully ignores the fundamental hostility of a Wahiduddin Khan (and of many others whom they welcome on Hindutva platforms), just like the US Government ignores the intense anti-Americanism and Islamic militancy in Pakistan.

Similarly, the enthusiasm in Sangh circles for Ansar Hussain Khan, a second Muslim who actually talks with Sangh people and thereby breaks through the cordon sanitaire which the secularists have laid around the Hindutva movement (assuring him of intense gratitude in Sangh circles), shows a painful lack of viveka/discrimination. I have nothing against the man personally, and from his acclaimed book The Rediscovery of India I get the impression that he is sincerely seeking an exit from the Islamic worldview; only, he has not yet freed himself from certain basic attachments to things Islamic.[3] I know from experience that outgrowing a closed creed like Christianity or Islam is usually done in stages (e.g. there are millions of people in Europe who have rejected their Church but not yet Christ), so I will not hold it against him that he hasn't reached the stage of full emancipation yet. I also appreciate the courage it must take for a Muslim secularist to write in positive terms about the Sangh. But if we limit our evaluation to the actual ideas formulated by Ansar Hussein Khan, we find certain things which are just unacceptable.

First of all, he builds up the well-known argument that the crimes which Islam has committed in India are violations of the true spirit and the true law of Islam. This is the great illusion which most modern Hindus cherish: the true Islam as conceived by the founder is impeccable, the only problem is that some followers misunderstood him, or that purely nominal Muslims with little interest in the true Quranic message falsely used the label "Islam" as justification for their un-Islamic selfish acts.

Even among known Hindu critics of Islam, if you scratch the surface, something of that illusion has withstood their best scholarly insights.[4] I suggest Hindutva ideologues start to live up to the image which the secularists have propagated about them, viz. that they are anti-Islamic. Unfortunately, though a good many of them are anti-Muslim at heart, most of them are not anti-Islamic at all.

The second and most dangerous message in A.H. Khan's book is his plea for undoing the Partition, reminding us of similar pleas by K.R. Malkani and other Sangh stalwarts. True, India should not have been partitioned, the Hindu masses were right to vote for a party which promised to prevent Partition (unfortunately, that party, the Congress, was deliberately fooling the voters), the Hindu organizations were right to campaign against it. But history moves in strange ways, and yesterday's disaster may be today's blessing. For Hinduism as such, Partition has by now proved to be a blessing in disguise, a last chance to survive. When you consider that before Independence, the Hindu Congress stalwarts were taken for a ride by the determined Muslim leadership though the Muslims represented less than one-fourth of the population and there were practically no Islamic states to support them, how would the Hindus fare in a united India in which the Muslims now constitute one-third of the population and receive support from rich and well-armed Islamic states?

The last offers made to Jinnah to make him abandon his Partition plans included 50% reservations for Muslims at all levels and an effective predominance of the Muslims in the government. What Jinnah gave up by refusing the offer was a Muslim-dominated Akhand Bharat, an unassailable country with the highest population in the world, with "Vedanta brain and Muslim body" (freely after Vivekananda): Hindu brains to serve the progressively islamicizing regime by building satellites and nuclear bombs, and Muslim muscle to push back the Hindu element until it would vanish the way it is actually vanishing from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Possibly this would have led to a civil war, but it is by no means certain that Hindus would have won. Hindus were just not ready for Akhand Bharat, because they were not ready with Islam.

The present Indian state is already difficult for Hindus to manage; apart from the Demolition (responsibility not acknowledged) and a few Supreme Court verdicts (no merit of politicians), the Hindutva forces have suffered defeat upon defeat in their struggle with the secularists and Islam, essentially because they have never resolved to wage war against the Islamic-cum-secularist forces which are already waging an all-out war against Hinduism. They failed to enact an effective ban on cow-slaughter, to enact effective curbs on missionary subversion, to integrate Kashmir, to stop the 1991 Places of Worship Act, to withhold statutory status from the Minorities Commission, to stop (let alone reverse) Bangladeshi infiltration.

In this light, all the Hindutva daydreaming of a pan-Subcontinental federation (whence the cordial welcome to A.H. Khan) is profoundly mistaken. It amounts to saying: "Now that we have proven ourselves unable to handle small problems, give us big problems to let us handle those." It is no coincidence that all Muslim intellectuals now openly deplore Partition: they now realize that Indian Islam lost on Partition, and that it is quite capable of taking control of the whole Subcontinent. They have given up believing their own lies about the RSS being a formidable fighting force threatening the Muslims, they know very well that Hindu society under its present "leadership" is no match for determined Islamic gangsterism. They even think that the RSS can serve their ends:



bringing down the one defence which stands between Islam and the annihilation of Hinduism, viz. the Indian state. For all its Muslim appeasement and anti-Hindu discriminations (cfr. *infra*), the Indian state is not aggressively anti-Hindu: the Hindu-born ruling class may sell itself for petrodollars, but it does not organize the kind of oppression which exists in Pakistan. It does not support Hinduism, but at least it passively allows Hindu culture to flourish on its own strength. Most importantly, the Indian police and armed forces (unlike those in the Akhand Bharat which Jinnah spurned) are predominantly Hindu, and they are not passive bystanders when Muslims terrorize Hindus, as they are in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Partition has been a mistake, from the Islamic viewpoint. The Muslim community has been split into three roughly equal parts; Pakistan and Bangladesh are uninspiring backwaters; the Muslims in the more promising state of India cannot entirely free themselves of the Partition stigma, and will be unable to take power there for at least another half century. It is now clear that from the viewpoint of Islamic interests, the pro-Partition Aligarh school was wrong and the anti-Partition Deoband school was right: Islam in India should not have settled for a part of the country, but should have aimed for control of the whole country. The plan is that Pakistan and Bangladesh remain Islamic states, but India should become a joint account. In Bangladesh the idea is very popular because it would formalize the *de facto* permeability of the Indian border for Bangladeshi migrants.

Short, Akhand Bharat is now high on the Islamic agenda, and calculating Muslims are welcoming and encouraging RSS romantic daydreaming about reunification. But so far, I have not seen any Sangh spokesman pause and wonder why Islamic strategists have suddenly joined them in wanting to undo the Partition. They see no reason for suspicion.

A similar case of unjustified lack of suspicion seems to be moving up on the BJP's and India's political agenda: proposals to change the electoral system, including the replacement of the first-past-the-post system with a proportional system. This system, which functions well in the Netherlands and Israel (and in diluted form in most European countries), would be an unwise choice for India, because it would allow Islamist parties to enter the parliaments, not just from Muslim-majority districts but from wherever the Muslim vote is worth a seat. This would then force secular parties to compete with the Muslim League for the Muslim vote, which they will do by promising ever-greater concessions to Islam. The effect will be similar to the creation of separate electorates in the pre-independence period. At the time of writing, I am not aware of a definitive consensus about this in the BJP, but not of a realization of the danger either.[5] The BJP used to support the proportional system which favours smaller parties when it was a small party itself, but now that it is a large party, it may avert the danger out of sheer self-interest.

As for undoing the Partition, it is true that India should ultimately be reunited, but which India? What do the Sangh people expect to achieve by undoing Partition without undoing the doctrinal conditioning which led to Partition in the first place? Do they prefer an Islamic Akhand Bharat to a partitioned India which allows Hinduism to survive in its major part? Have they given any thought to the probable outcome of their policies? In their case, that is always the question.

Unfortunately, Sangh Parivar ideologues labour under the illusion that they can leave Islam intact while removing the "anti-national" element from it. Most of them, even including the fairly radical former BJS president Balraj Madhok, have suggested that the Islam problem can be solved by "indianization": Islam has to "indianize" itself. Or as the Organiser once put it: "Let Muslims look upon Ram as their hero and the communal problems will be all over." [6] Islam, however, is a seamless garment, and it cannot be freed from its anti-Hindu doctrine while retaining its Allah and Mohammed. Muslims cannot look upon Rama as "their" hero without ceasing to be Muslims.

The term "indianization" implies that the problem with Islam is its un-Indianness. And this, in turn, would imply a nationalistically distorted view of religion: that a nation should only follow native traditions and shun foreign contributions in religion. By such standards, the adoption of Hinduism or Buddhism by the peoples of East and Southeast Asia would not be a matter of pride (as it seems to be for the Sangh) but a violation of the proper world order. The Khmers should have rejected Shiva and built their Angkor temple to some native deity; the Balinese should not enact the Ramayana but create an epic around a native hero instead. The "holyland" of many East-Asian Buddhists is not their own country, but India: the Mahabodhi temple was renovated in the 19th century by the king of Burma, and is now surrounded by guest-houses catering to many thousands of pilgrims from each Buddhist country every year. Should we deduce that these Thai or Japanese pilgrims are being "anti-national" by having such "extra-territorial" religious loyalty? And that the Mongolian and Chinese Communists were right to crack down on Buddhism? That would be the implication if we start reducing religions to their geographical provenance instead of studying their contents. In this case, patriotism is not the refuge of scoundrels, but of duffers.

This futile attempt to identify the Islam problem in terms of "Indian" vs. "foreign" implies a second similarity with certain undesirable xenophobic trends in the West. Semi-literate xenophobic ideologues in Europe identify Islam as "a foreign religion, fit for Asiatics but not for Europe". In their opinion, there is nothing wrong with Islam, as long as it remains in its country of origin. This is not too different from the applause given in Hindutva publications to Anwar Shaykh's thesis that "Islam is the Arab national movement". In his book *Islam, the Arab National Movement*, the Pakistan-born apostate author from Cardiff (with a death-warrant fatwa on his head since 1994) accurately documents how islamization has meant external arabization (names, clothes, script) for most converted populations, but wrongly infers that Islam is a form of Arab nationalism or Arab imperialism.

For the Sangh, this thesis was doubly welcome: it recast the Islam problem in the familiar, safely secular-sounding terms of nationalism, and it legitimized Islam ("See we're not against Islam?") all while limiting its legitimate geographical domain so as to exclude India from it. The implication is that Hinduism is Indian nationalism, and Islam is Arab nationalism. This is grossly unjust to the Arabs and the native Arab culture which Islam destroyed. There is nothing Arab about Islam, a doctrine confabulated by Mohammed from half-digested bits and pieces of Jewish and Christian lore, combined with his own extraordinary self-image and the hallucinations registered on his sensory nerves (the Quranic voice he "heard"). Except for a small minority of people attracted to Mohammed out of gullibility or lust for booty and power, the Arabs were only forced under the yoke of Islam after valiantly resisting it. For the sake of comparison, Communism was not the

"Chinese national movement" just because Chairman Mao's Communists militarily wrested the country from the legitimate Nationalist Government of Chiang Kai-shek. The genuine Arab national movement was the so-called Ridda ("return" to god-pluralism) uprising against the Islamic state after Mohammed's death, in which the Arabs tried to restore their pluralistic culture.[7]

The review of Anwar Shaykh's work in *Organiser* was titled "Muslim proud of his Aryan heritage". This was, first of all, an untruthful statement. It is true that Anwar Shaykh has rediscovered the "Aryan" (i.e. Vedic) heritage which his great-grandfather had abandoned by converting to Islam.[8] But the consequence of this rediscovery was precisely the opposite of what the *Organiser* title suggests: he quit Islam, becoming a "non-Muslim proud of his Aryan heritage". Secondly, this title sent the wrong message to Indian Muslims. The message which *Organiser* sought to convey was that Indian Muslims should follow Anwar Shaykh's example: remain Muslim all while rediscovering their Aryan heritage (or with an older term, "indianizing" themselves). This was a replay of the Gandhian myth of the "nationalist Muslim" for whom Islam and Indianness are not incompatible.[9] But the case of Anwar Shaykh proved just the opposite: by rediscovering his Hindu heritage, a Muslim loses his Muslim identity. Islamic fanatics are wholly aware of this phenomenon, which is why they try to nip it in the bud, e.g. by forbidding Hindu religious music on Pakistani radio. The message of the *Organiser* should have been: "Indian Muslims, follow Anwar Shaykh's example, rediscover your Vedic heritage, and abandon Islam."

A similar case is that of BJP office-bearer Sikander Bakht. Mr. Bakht is a thorough gentleman, but his main value for the BJP is that he is a born Muslim. He is often shown off as the party's token Muslim, but just as often, angry Muslims write letters to the editor to explain that Mr. Bakht is not a Muslim at all. They say that he actually converted to Hinduism on the occasion of his marriage to a Hindu lady, and that his children were raised as Hindus. Now, when I am to choose between the BJP version and the Muslim version, I tend to attribute more credibility to the latter. If it is true that Mr. Bakht is a convert, I certainly applaud the BJP policy of giving due prominence to him. Only, they should have the sincerity and the wisdom to add the correct message, which is not: "We have Muslims as well", but: "We welcome Indian Muslims seeking the way out of Islam back into their ancestral culture."

[1] Cfr. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan: *Indian Muslims. The Need for a Positive Outlook* (Al-Risala Books, Delhi 1994), p.109-130. Within the limitations of the Muslim outlook, this is nonetheless a lucid and well-intended book.

[2] Cfr. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan: *Tabligh Movement*, Islamic Centre, Delhi 1986.

[3] Ansar Hussein Khan: *The Rediscovery of India. A New Subcontinent*, Orient Longman, Delhi 1995. The book is well-written; particularly pleasant to read is the candid deconstruction of the entire Congress version of the Freedom Struggle and the Partition machinations, which cuts secular icon Jawaharlal Nehru to size. The book also contains in appendix the correspondence between Khan and the BJP leadership.

[4] E.g., in 1993 a leading historian signed a petition against Syed Shahabuddin's attempt to get Ram Swarup's book *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam* banned, but not after suggesting a change in

the text: instead of the phrase which refuses to Shahabuddin the role of "conscience-keeper of the nation", he wanted to put "conscience-keeper of Islam". The implication was that Islam is alright, but that Shahabuddin distorts Islam.

[5] In its 1996 Election Manifesto (p.11), the BJP promises to "examine the feasibility of introducing the list system", which would imply multi-seat constituencies giving a more proportional representation to smaller parties. Incidentally, political experience in Belgium and other countries using a list system shows that it strengthen the control of the parties over the candidates, which may (as Euroskeptic defenders of the British first-past-the-post system rightly argue) be questionable from the viewpoint of democracy.

[6] Organiser, 20/6/1971, quoted in Tapan Basu et al.: Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags, p.12.

[7] Even A.A. Engineer (The Origin and Development of Islam, Orient Longman, Delhi 1987, 2nd ed., p.131) admits that "the war of ridda (apostasy) was a general insurrection throughout Arabia".

[8] The story is told in Anwar Shaykh: Eternity (Principality Publishers, Cardiff 1990) and in various issues of his quarterly Liberty.

[9] Of course, it can and does happen that an Indian Muslim has genuine patriotic feelings, but this is necessarily in spite and at the detriment of his commitment to Islam. Many Indian Muslims are not "Pakistani patriots", firstly because Pakistan is mistreating their own Mohajir cousins, and secondly because Pakistan is a failure in every secular respect except terrorism. Their dream of an Indian-Muslim state is no match for the reality that unlike Pakistan, India is a country to be proud of. In that sense, I am willing to accept the self-description of people like M.J. Akbar as "nationalist Muslims". But they remain stuck with a problem of divided loyalties, and part of the reason why they have accepted their Indianness is that the present Republic is in many ways an incarnation of their second (Islamic) loyalty as well: a pro-Muslim regime dedicated to weakening Hinduism.

# 15. A party of shopkeepers

The BJP eagerly wants to be friends with everyone who counts as respectable. The best predictor of their positions in upcoming political issues is: what will the opinion-making establishment say? When new fads appear on the public scene, whether it is the Ambedkar cult or reservations for women in Parliament, the BJP is sure to pick them up in due course.[1] Instead of radicalism, the record of its manifestoes, resolutions, interventions in parliament, and public statements, shows a goody-goody approach to all the forces which are animated by a declared and unyielding hatred of the BJP. This may have something to do with the party's castewise roots.

It is often alleged that the BJP is an upper-caste party out to preserve the privileges of the upper castes. The grain of truth in this is that the BJP, like the Congress and the Communist Party, was founded by Brahmins. But like these other parties, it goes along with the general shift from upper to middle and lower castes as the most numerous actors on the political scene. Significantly, the radicalization of the party during the period of intensified Hindu-Muslim confrontation over the Ayodhya temple-mosque dispute was led by lower-caste BJP leaders like Uma Bharati, Vinay Katiyar and Kalyan Singh (BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1991-92, politically responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid).

Still, the BJP is often called a "party of Brahmins and Banias", and its political style justifies this label to an extent. While Brahmins provide the Sanskritic (transregional, culture-centred) outlook, it is the Bania merchants whose influence seems predominant in shaping the image and the psychology of the party.[2] When a Leftist commentator tries to explain BJP policy decisions, he usually blames the economic achievements and problems of the "urban traders" who seek to build themselves a cultural identity and use the BJP to that end. It is even said that they, as aspiring capitalists, use the RSS-BJP to reform Hinduism into a monolithic "Semitic" religion, supposedly more fit as a cultural framework for capitalist development.[3]

The grain of truth in this Marxist reduction of the BJP programme to a mercantile strategy is that at least psychologically, the BJP can best be understood as "a party of shopkeepers". The BJP is not the party of the rich, who always tend to be on the side of power, i.e., the anti-BJP establishment (as is evident from the media they own, and which are either mildly or virulently anti-BJP). But in large measure the BJP has become the party of the aspiring middle and lower middle classes. Partly this is because the last ten years or so, it had profiled itself as the least socialist and most pro-entrepreneurial party. For the truly big business houses, this wasn't that important, because they had established their own arrangements with the corrupt Nehruvian state; the stifling effect of Nehruvian socialism was felt most acutely by smaller and newly-started businesses. To an even larger extent, the success of the BJP is due to its promise of stopping the disintegration of India and maintaining stability, a prerequisite for economic progress.

After its 1996 failure to win a confidence vote for its 13-day government, the BJP has accepted that its only chance lies in gaining an absolute majority. Fortunately for the party, few Hindutva-minded

voters are fully informed about the week-kneed positions taken by its inner circle; most go by its general Hindu image, and by the allegations of Hindu extremism spread by its opponents. On the other hand, BJP strategists have a point when they calculate that many middle-of-the-road voters need the assurance of moderation given by leaders like Vajpayee before they can cross the threshold to voting for the BJP. In the heart of the mainstream Hindu voter, the combative Hindu feeling goes underground as long as it is not provoked, and the moderate shopkeeper-type predominates, so that in peace time (as in May 1996), he does not mind a shopkeeper mentality in the party he'll vote for. But the relative quietness on the communal front may not last, and in troubled regions, Hindus tend to set up more radical organizations, modelled on (and often named after) Mumbai's Shiv Sena. The BJP had best prepare a contingency plan for the inevitable next round of confrontation, or it will be pushed aside once more by impatient youngsters as it was on 6 December 1992.

The signature of the trader mentality is visible in the entire BJP approach to politics. Good traders treat trade as a win-win situation: the seller makes a profit, the buyer acquires a desired product, both making gains without forcing losses on their trading-partners. In humdrum peace time, of course, this is the right attitude to politics. But in times of serious political confrontation, they have difficulty in understanding that achieving one's own goal implies inflicting defeat on a second party. Shopkeepers try to curry favour with everyone, and avoid straightforward ("divisive") ideological stances and debates in order not to alienate potential business partners. Their idea of combativeness is to outwit buyers and competitors; they fancy they can catch a much-desired prize on the cheap, without confrontation.

This mentality was conspicuous during the Ayodhya affair, when the BJP fostered the illusion that Hindu gain could be gotten without Muslim loss, that Muslims could be talked into abandoning their claim to the disputed site, that confrontation was avoidable. The BJP was formally right, in that the disputed building was no longer a mosque as idols had been worshipped in there since 1949. But in real terms, the Muslim leadership certainly felt deprived of something very important: the Quran-based right to trample on non-Muslims, e.g. by usurping their sacred sites. Even though the BJP's White Paper on Ayodhya and the Rama Temple Movement (1993) is a well-written and generally complete document, certainly the best chronology of the whole Ayodhya dispute, it leaves out a discussion of the one historical fact that justifies and lends importance to the Ayodhya movement, viz. that the demolition of the medieval Rama temple at the site was by no means an isolated event, but a necessary consequence of Islamic doctrine.

Not to antagonize Muslim and secularist opinion, the BJP avoided going into the question why the Rama temple in Ayodhya, along with thousands of others, had been demolished by Muslim invaders and rulers,-- a question pregnant with doctrinal confrontation between idolatrous Hinduism and iconoclastic Islam. Or rather, it gave a pseudo-explanation in terms of "foreign invaders" and "national humiliation", hoping to trick the Indian Muslims into affirming that they too are part of the Indian nation (as they always imply when they reject any identification of India with Hinduism) and therefore feel equally strongly about the "national honour" embodied in the Rama temple-to-be.

So far, so good: if they could resolve the controversy with superficial and syrupy rhetoric, without raking up old history, that might have been defensible. But the point is that, first of all, this accommodating attitude was not rewarded or even acknowledged in any way by the secularists (who falsely maintained that the BJP was attacking Islam), and secondly, the BJP spokesmen did rake up old history, though not in the anti-Islamic sense alleged by their enemies. When BJP spokesmen mentioned history in the Ayodhya context, it was mostly to deny a fact inconvenient to their opponents (whom they were trying to get into a positive mood), viz. the fact that iconoclasm and intolerance are intrinsic elements of Islamic doctrine, and not aberrations from it.[4]

Sangh Parivar spokesmen have claimed that far from encouraging the annihilation of idol cults, Islam actually prohibits the demolition of idol temples, and that the Prophet Mohammed had a mosque demolished when he found that it had been built in forcible replacement of a temple. This was a convenient fiction: the Islamic temple demolishers in India and elsewhere had always done their thing with full backing from competent religious authorities, because Mohammed himself had all non-Islamic places of worship in Arabia either demolished or turned into mosques, and his model behaviour has an unfailing force of precedent in Islamic law. These facts are in conflict with the alluring BJP plea that nothing in Islam prohibits the Muslims from accepting the conversion of a mosque into an idol-house. The BJP shopkeepers calculated that a white lie might make the desired Muslim abandonment of any claim to the Ayodhya site cheaper in terms of blood and sweat expended. Of course, the Muslim leaders were not fooled into believing that Islam allows the replacement of a mosque with an idol-house.

People who try to deceive others, thinking they are very clever, usually end up deceiving only themselves and being disbelieved by others even when they do speak the truth. The BJP is not convincing anyone when it claims that its prime concern in the Common Civil Code issue is the well-being of Muslim women, or when it claims that it has no problems with Islam and Christianity as such, or when it pleads that "genuine Islam" exhorts Muslims to abandon the Ayodhya mosque. These positions fail to mollify the adversary, but they are very effective in confusing the BJP rank and file, Hindu militants at heart but forced to defend secularist positions as a matter of party-line.

[1] In a TV debate on caste issues (ca. 1995), Ram Vilas Paswan attacked Dronacharya, the teacher of the Pandavas, for refusing to teach the tribal boy Ekalavya. The reply to this could have been that Drona's decision had nothing to do with caste considerations: he simply did the job he was paid for, viz. to make the Pandavas the best archers in the land, not to teach his skills to any others whatever their caste. Instead, VHP spokesman Giriraj Kishore disowned Drona, saying that "we do not recognize him as an acharya". This way, Hindutva leaders disown everything which the secularists attack.

[2] A long chapter could be written about the role of caste history and caste psychology as determinants of politics in India. One example: in the British and post-colonial periods, the position of the Thakur (landlord) steadily deteriorated, while that of the Bania changed for the better: he became a modern entrepreneur, taking full advantage of modernization and urbanization. The envy of successful Banias felt by impoverished Thakurs and Rajas is certainly one of the reasons why the latter are so attracted to socialist-populist parties like the Janata Dal, typical examples being the

former Prime Ministers Chandra Shekhar and V.P. Singh.

[3] This is argued in all seriousness by Romila Thapar (in S. Gopal, ed.: *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, p.159) and parroted by numerous columnists.

[4] At this point, there is a difference between the BJP, which tried to be as superficial about the basic issue as possible, and the VHP, which developed a sharper position after accepting Chandra Shekhar's invitation to mandate scholars to discuss the historical evidence concerning the disputed site with a Babri Masjid Action Committee delegation (which withdrew from the talks when it found it had no chance of winning). However, even in VHP ranks it is not uncommon to hear preachers praise Mohammed and abuse Muslims for "misunderstanding" the Quran's true message.



# 16. Things to do for the BJP

The cleverness of the BJP is in evidence again in its choice to put the enactment of a Common Civil Code on India's political agenda. In India, marriage, divorce and inheritance are regulated by religion-based law codes which are different for Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis. Thus, a Hindu who wants to marry two women, knows that he will be punishable, but no longer if he converts to Islam (which is why there are actual cases of conversion for the sake of bigamy). For Christian men and women, divorce laws are equal but make it very difficult to obtain a divorce. For Hindus, it is a bit easier, but divorce is the easiest by far for Muslim men, who only have to pronounce triple talaq; Muslim women, by contrast, have to plead their case before a judge. This totally non-secular arrangement was meant to be only temporary, for the Constitution stipulates in its directive principles (Art. 44) that the State shall endeavour to enact a Common Civil Code. In 1995, the Supreme Court reminded the Government of this directive principle, and directed it to report on the progress made in the matter. The BJP has replaced Ayodhya with the Common Civil Code as its central "communal" theme.

The BJS-BJP has always demanded the implementation of Art.44, but the majority has blocked this secular policy time and again. The cleverness about this Common Civil Code demand is that it can be used both as proof of the BJP's secularism and as proof of the BJP's Hindu credibility. Many Hindutva-minded voters mistakenly believe that the Muslims' high birth rate is due to polygamy, and hope that a Common Civil Code will remedy this problem and thereby save the majority position and hence the survival of Hinduism in India. Yet, in my opinion a realistic evaluation would be that this issue is of little importance to specific Hindu interests. In a way, the Plural Civil Code is more in keeping with Hindu tradition, where every caste had its own distinctive marriage and inheritance customs. The Common Civil Code is not a demand of Hindu society (certainly not a priority), but is intrinsically a demand of secularism.

There are excellent reasons for replacing the Muslim right to unilateral talaq with an egalitarian arrangement valid for all Indian citizens equally, but it is doubtful that this desirable goal will be reached by means of a BJP initiative. The trouble of raising this impeccably secular and explicitly constitutional demand should be left to the secularists; as long as they don't put it on the agenda, the present religion-based personal law systems are a standing testimony to the hypocrisy of the secularist establishment. Equality before the law regardless of religion is an essential requirement of a secular state, and it is a measure of the perversion of India's political parlance that BJP opponents actually defend the separate religion-based civil codes in the name of secularism. But there is one serious problem with this demand: with extremely few exceptions, and with secularist support, the Muslim community opposes it tooth and nail.

In a futile bid to win the Muslims over, the BJP claims that there is nothing un-Islamic about abolishing the Sharia provisions on family matters, esp. by citing Muslim modernists like Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir as saying that the Sharia is obsolete, and by documenting how the Sharia was only imposed on the Indian Muslims late in the British period, in replacement of the customary

laws which many Muslim communities had preserved since the time of their conversion. Less than a century ago, the majority of the Indian Muslims did not follow the Sharia, true, but this only means that they were bad or incomplete Muslims, not that Islam doesn't care about which personal law system its faithful follow. Muslim tyrants and propagandists who converted Hindus did "first things first": the converts had to be brought into the Muslim fold and develop an attachment to Mohammed and the Quran; whether they also adapted their marriage and inheritance customs to Islamic prescriptions (often a revolutionary change in their communal life) was a question that could be put off till a more convenient time. While non-conformity with the Sharia can be tolerated as an intermediate stage in the islamization of a community, it is obvious that once the Sharia is established, it is un-Islamic to abolish it.

While the BJP congratulates itself on being so clever in insisting on an impeccably secular demand like the Common Civil Code, it does not seem to be aware that, like with the Ayodhya campaign, it is merely banging its head against the wall and making itself despised and hated. The most realistic prediction is that an effective abolition of the religion-based personal law systems by a future BJP government would provoke potentially violent agitations in every Muslim neighbourhood in India, as well as attacks on Indian and Hindu targets in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Great Britain and other countries. After all, the Ayodhya dispute was a fairly artificial conflict, in which the common Muslim had no stake (it is a Hindu, not a Muslim sacred site, and no ordinary Muslim had any plans ever to visit Ayodhya), and still it provoked a major wave of violence; but a change in the rules for marriage, divorce and inheritance affects every single Muslim personally.

A secular Common Civil Code would also diminish the power of Muslim clerics within their own community greatly. If we remember that the Shah of Iran turned a simmering discontent into an armed revolution the day he hurt the material interests of the clerical class, we can imagine that in India too, the mullahs would organize a massive resistance against such an attack on their position. The Hindus would again be blackened worldwide as mean oppressors of the poor hapless minorities, and the BJP's own government would find it hard to stay on course. There are no indications that the BJP has a contingency plan for such a nation-wide Muslim agitation.

The BJP's focus on the sensitive Common Civil Code issue is all the more strange when we consider that there are other, far safer and far more consequential issues waiting to be raised, which have a potential for mobilizing the Hindus without automatically provoking the minorities. When Sangh leaders are questioned on what grievances the Hindus could possibly have in a democratic state with a Hindu majority, they often mention Art.30 of the Constitution, which lays down that the minorities can set up government-sponsored denominational schools (implying the right to a communal bias in recruitment of teachers and students and a religion-centred curriculum). When the Constitutional Assembly voted this article, many delegates probably assumed that the extension of the same rights to the Hindu majority was self-understood; but in practice, this right is denied to the Hindus. This became hilariously clear in the 1980s, when the Ramakrishna Mission deemed it necessary to declare itself a non-Hindu minority (a self-definition challenged in court by its own members and struck down) in order to prevent the West Bengal government from nationalizing its schools.[1] Art.30 constitutes a very serious discrimination on grounds of religion, and is in conflict with the professed secular character of the Indian Republic.

In no democratic country would a majority community tolerate such discrimination, and it says a lot about the stranglehold which the secularist intelligentsia has on public discourse that this article hardly ever figures in debates on secularism and communalism. It also says a lot about the meekness of the Hindus in general and about the incompetence of the Hindutva movement in particular. Amending Art.30 to extend the privileges of the minorities to every community including the Hindus would benefit Hindu society as a whole, would terminate a humiliating and damaging inequality, but would not affect the minorities; they retain the rights conceded to them in the present version of Art.30. No doubt some minority and secularist agitators will try to explain that equality before the law constitutes oppression of the minorities, but it should be feasible to restate the correct position in such a way as to convince most unbiased observers.[2] At any rate, the Muslim and Christian masses would not feel affected the way they would be in case of the enactment of a Common Civil Code, and that makes the issue much easier to handle. So easy that even the BJP could do it.

So, from the Hindutva movement's viewpoint, this should be a beautiful campaign theme: it is a very consequential issue, it is very representative of the discrimination which Hindus claim to suffer in secular India (and thereby justifies to the outside world why there has to be a Hindu movement in the first place), the amendment is impeccably secular, and best of all: it is not directed against anyone, it is a revolution with no enemies. If the BJP had any political acumen, it would have taken a parliamentary initiative to amend Art.30, or prominently raised the issue in some other way, in the months before the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. This would have forced the other parties to either come out in support of the equality principle, so that the BJP could claim a major victory for Hindu interests; or to defend the existing inequality, and in that case the BJP could go to the voter (and to world opinion) with the unambiguous proof that it is not the BJP but the other parties which stand for religious discrimination and injustice.

In spite of all the benefits which such an amendment would have for Hindu society as well as for the BJP, no attempt was made in that direction. The 1996 BJP Election Manifesto does not mention Art.30 in the list of "Constitutional reforms" proposed on p.9-10. The article is mentioned only on p.64 in a two-line promise, fifth in a list of fourteen points under the heading "Our minorities": "5. Ensure equality for all and discrimination against none on grounds of religion in matters of education by amending Article 30." Note that the BJP does not find the issue sufficiently important for spelling out just what amendment it proposes. The record shows that the BJS/BJP parliamentarians (including India's longest-serving parliamentarian, A.B. Vajpayee) have never taken any initiative on this matter. No politician with whom I have spoken could give a credible explanation for this decades-long negligence.

The VHP included the demand of an amendment to Art.30 in its Hindu Agenda (a list of 40 demands presented to all political parties, drawn up during the VHP National Board meeting in Mumbai in December 1995, which I attended), but not with due prominence. A leading VHP sadhu explained to me that he and his colleagues had found the temple issue (liberation of the sacred sites in Kashi and Mathura) to be the best mobilizer among the masses, while issues like Art.30 attracted little attention among the people. My suspicion is that he neither questioned nor informed common people about Art.30, and that his finding was perfectly circular: if you only think and talk about the

disputed temples, it is obvious that this is what people will respond to. The Hindutva activists attribute to the people their own narrow focus on symbolic but inconsequential issues. When you see how the small Christian community can lobby and mobilize for its "Reservations for Dalit Christians" demand, the claimed difficulty in mobilizing Hindus against their second-class status in education sounds like sheer laziness. At any rate, leaders don't ask the masses for motivation, they motivate.

Among BJP spokesmen, it was only Rama Jois, the lawyer representing the BJP before the Supreme Court in connection with the Ayodhya dispute (1993-94), who agreed with conviction that the BJP should take up the issue and showed that he had even given some thought to the formulation of the required amendment.[3] The only Member of Parliament who has formally proposed an amendment to Art.30, extending minority privileges to the majority, is Syed Shahabuddin (April 1995). His ostensible reason was that every linguistic or religious community which is in a minority at some level, is bound to also be the majority at some other level (say, national versus provincial or local). His Bill never made it to the voting stage, but it showed how Shahabuddin is aware of the mobilizing potential of the Art.30 issue: he tried to defuse it before the BJP could acquire the brains to perceive and exploit this potential.

If anti-Hindu leaders like Shahabuddin can see the importance of this issue, how come the BJP leadership is ignoring it? Is it sheer brain paralysis, as Hindu critics of the BJP allege, that the BJP spurns manageable and important issues in favour of unmanageable and unimportant ones? In this case, I really don't know even the beginning of an explanation. It is typical of Sangh mores to put on a clever face and pretend there is a secret long-term strategy which will take care of everything, but I am skeptical.

Article 30 is the Constitutional bedrock of a considerable list of similar anti-Hindu discriminations.[4] Among them is the unequal treatment of Hindu and non-Hindu places of worship. Muslims have full control of their mosques, Christians have full control of their churches, but Hindus are systematically deprived of the control of their temples. Recently the authorities tried (unsuccessfully) to have the Shirdi Sai Baba temple in Hyderabad declared a Hindu temple, because that would allow them to take it over and do what they have been doing everywhere to Hindu temples: siphon the income off to their own pockets or to other non-Hindu purposes. This is a major factor in the dire poverty which Hindu temple priests (whose wages have not been adjusted for decades) and their families suffer.

Injustice to Hindus in education and temple management: here are two problems with deep and painful effects on the life and the future of Hinduism, and what is the BJP doing? If the BJP does not take up these issues, if it does not present a short-term plan to remedy this injustice, if its state governments do not do everything within their power to give at least partial solutions to these problems with immediate effect, then the party does not deserve to get a single Hindu vote.

[1] The attempts of the RK Mission and of an Arya Samaj faction to get recognition as a religious minority prove several things: that Hinduism is a dirty word and many Hindus are ashamed to be called Hindu; but also that Hindus under threat do not count on the BJP to defend them, and

prefer the safety exit to minority status.

[2] I remember M.J. Akbar arguing to this effect against any tampering with Art.30, on the assumption that this would mean bringing the position of the minorities down to that of the Hindus, rather than adjusting the Hindu position upward. Among foreign India-watchers too, the impression exists that the BJP would take away these rights from the minorities rather than extend them to the Hindus; this may be due to disinformation by the M.J. Akbars of this world, but unfortunately, it cannot be excluded that some Hindutva spokesman has indeed been stupid enough to interpret "amending Article 30" in this sense, unmindful of the terrific agitation which this would provoke among the minorities.

[3] Interview, December 1995, Vadodara. Jois's comment on the Supreme Court verdict (rejecting a request by the Narasimha Rao government to pass judgment on the historical question whether the Babri mosque had indeed been built in forcible replacement of a Hindu temple) is in Swapan Dasgupta et al.: *The Ayodhya Reference* (Voice of India 1995), p.96-106.

[4] Discussed in Abhas Chatterjee: *The Concept of Hindu State*, p.33-44.

# 17. Christ in India

The Sangh is even less combative vis-à-vis Christianity than vis-à-vis Islam. The Christian Churches must be counted among Hindutva's most determined enemies. Much of the negative image which the BJP has acquired internationally is due to the lasting powerful impact of the Churches on the information stream concerning the Third World. In quarrels between the Hindutva forces and the Muslims or the secularists, the Christian institutions are invariably on the anti-Hindu side. There are also Christian armed separatist movements in Nagaland and Mizoram, which are openly supported by the World Council of Churches and by a number of Catholic institutions.

Some Hindu writers have therefore developed detailed criticisms of Christian political behaviour in India, detailing records of conversion, and discussing the missions' international sponsoring.[1] This line of argument is also developed in books formally published by the Sangh Parivar itself through its "think-tank", the Deendayal Research Institute, most notably Devendra Swarup, ed.: *Politics of Conversion* (1986). A more fundamental critique of Christianity itself, regardless of its alleged "anti-national designs" and use as an "instrument of the Western powers", but more in touch with Western developments in Church history and Bible research, is only available in publications by independent writers, mostly through Voice of India.[2]

The Sangh Parivar cannot be accused of a confrontationist stance vis-à-vis the Christians and the missionaries. The single most frightening moment for the Christian mission strategists was in the mid-1950s, when the BJS was hardly in the picture as a political force. The Congress government of Madhya Pradesh ordered an investigation of fraudulent conversions through social pressure and material inducement by Christian missionaries in the tribal belt. The BJS supported the implementation of the recommendations (for a much stricter control of missionary activities and finances) concluding the highly critical report of this committee. The BJS 1957 election manifesto stated: "The recommendations of the Niyogi Committee and Rege Committee will be implemented to free the Bharatiya Christians from the anti-national influence of foreign missionaries." [3] Remark the language used: it sounds as if the BJS wants to protect the Christians against the missionaries. Then already, it apparently felt the need to cloak its concern for Hindu (including tribal) interests in an ostensible concern for the minorities. At any rate, Nehru prevented the report from having any political consequences.

The BJS took up the same thread of checking the missionary activities when it reckoned it was in a stronger position to impose its will, viz. when it was part of the Janata Party government. In 1978, O.P. Tyagi proposed his Freedom of Religion Bill in the Lok Sabha, with the object of prohibiting conversions by force or allurement. The Christian missions launched a worldwide propaganda campaign against it, and the Leftist sections of the Janata Party also opposed it, so that nothing came of it. But the BJS had at least tried; the BJP cannot even be credited with trying.

In 1994, the Churches created a similar stir, on the occasion of a very small incident in the Chennai area. After reading Ishwar Sharan's book *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva*

Temple, which argued that a number of churches including the one commemorating Saint Thomas's alleged martyrdom had been built on destroyed Shiva temples, a back-bench member of the RSS-affiliated Tamil organization Hindu Munnani went to a church in Pondicherry, equipped with the paraphernalia for puja, and inquired where the Shiva lingam was, so that he could worship it. He had learnt that the Cathedral had been built on the site of the Vedapuri-Ishwaran Temple after the temple had been destroyed in 1748 by the Jesuits aided by the then French governor of Pondicherry. Immediately, the Catholic Church was alarmed and warned that the Hindu fundamentalists were trying to create a second Ayodhya affair. The Hindu Munnani responded to the challenge in a very modest way, holding a small demonstration near the church (as close as the police allowed them to go) to draw attention to the Catholic Church's record in the attempted destruction of Hinduism in South India.

The Hindu Munnani did not let the controversy escalate any further, not least because the BJP had immediately disowned the fledgling movement. The story of how the Vedapuri-Ishwaran temple was destroyed had been documented in great detail in Sita Ram Goel's *History of Hindu Christian Encounters* published in 1989. He requested an RSS journalist whose syndicated column was published in many newspapers across the country, to make the story more widely known by devoting one of the articles to it. He agreed but did not keep his promise. Goel tried to get the story summarized in the *Organizer* also, and immediately sent a copy of his book to the editor who expressed willingness over the telephone. But weeks passed without the weekly even mentioning the episode. Later on, it was learnt that the Sangh leaders had decided to suppress the story, and so it was blocked out of the media controlled by the Sangh Parivar. When I mentioned this incident to some leading BJP members, none of them expressed any interest in, let alone sympathy for the Hindu Munnani's position. K.R. Malkani, whom the media always describe as "BJP ideologue", laughed it off and said that "we have no quarrel with the Christians".

Why did the BJP refuse to focus attention on the record of Christian aggression? Though focusing on conflictual chapters in history has been decried and condemned in the strongest terms when Hindus did just that during the Ayodhya campaign, it is a perfectly respectable activity in other parts of the world. Every now and then, we hear of some new monument or movie commemorating the Holocaust and confirming the Germans in their role of culprits. Monuments are being built to commemorate the victims of Communism, and hence to draw attention to the guilt of their Communist oppressors and executioners. Except for Hindu society victimized in centuries of Muslim rule, every community which considers itself the victim of large-scale aggression at some point in history freely exercises the right to fix the memory of this crime in the collective consciousness.

Most to the point, the not-so-gentle conquest and christianization of the Americas has been commemorated on a very large scale in 1992, on the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing. It so happens that another 500th anniversary is approaching: that of Vasco da Gama's landing in India in 1498. Juridically and theologically, this event was the exact counterpart of Columbus's landing in America. In the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, the Pope had allotted two halves of the world to Spain and Portugal, on condition that these Christian states organize the christianization of their respective colonies. Most of America and East Asia fell to Spain, while Portugal got the area from

Brazil to China, including Africa and India. The Portuguese were less successful in India than the Spanish were in America, not because their intentions and methods were different, but simply because the power equation was different: the Indians were better equipped (cannon, horses, resistance to diseases) than the Native Americans, while the Portuguese were fewer in number than the Spanish. On a smaller scale, the Portuguese in India behaved just like the Spanish in America: forcible conversions, massacres of the native priesthood, destruction of places of worship.

Therefore, the question arises: is there any chance of a 1998 commemoration comparable to the 1992 commemorations? In 1992, even the Pope felt he couldn't ignore the painful anniversary, and in the name of the Catholic Church, he publicly apologized to the Native Americans. This was the result of a broad movement in public opinion, including the cultural sector and politicians from every American country. Is there any chance that the Pope will feel sufficiently pressured to do the same thing towards the Hindus? As things stand at the time of writing, it looks like there will be no trace of a similar Christian soul-searching, simply because there will be no Hindu pressure in that direction. In December 1995, Hindu Munnani activists in Chennai told me that they vaguely consider "doing something", but no writer or film director is creating an opinion climate, and even the political party allegedly waging a campaign against the Christians is not taking up the issue at all. Mr. Malkani emphatically denied that the BJP would ever consider participating in or give a lead to such a movement.

To sum up, while a part of the BJP constituency certainly harbours anti-Christian feelings, the BJP is careful to avoid any confrontation with the powerful Christian Churches. One reason is that most Hindus are simply not sufficiently informed about Christianity to take it on in any meaningful way (often sentimentally cherishing crazy myths about Jesus having lived in India, the Gospel teaching yoga, etc.). Another is that the calculating BJP politicians see courtesy to Christianity as one of the prerequisites for achieving the mirage-like goal of being accepted as secular.

[1] Typical examples are Brahma Datt Bharati: *Christian Conversions* (1980), Thanulinga Nadar: *Unrest at Kanyakumari* (1983), and Major T.R. Vedantham: *Christianity, a Political Problem* (1984).

[2] Examples are Ram Swarup: *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam* (1992) and *Hindu-Buddhist Rejoinder to Pope John-Paul II* (1995), Sita Ram Goel: *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters* (1989, 1996) and *Jesus Christ, Artifice for Aggression* (1995), Ishwar Sharan: *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple* (1991, 1994), and Arun Shourie: *Missionaries in India* (1994).

[3] Party Documents, vol.1, p.82.



# 18. Hindus wielding the sword of Islam

When Akbar had Rajput armies fight his Rajput enemies, he rejoiced at the sight of "Hindus wielding the sword of Islam". When his archers could not distinguish between the Rajput mercenaries and the Rajput freedom-fighters, he told them that it didn't matter, since anyone killed would be a Kafir anyway. India's greatest Moghul is often mindlessly lauded by Hindus as a "secular" ruler, but while he should be credited with a certain wisdom, he was and remained an enemy of the Infidels. Unlike the Delhi sultans, who constantly provoked Hindu uprisings with their cruel politics of jihad (apart from weakening themselves with their internecine fighting), Akbar managed to consolidate a Muslim empire by incorporating a sufficient number of Hindus in his apparatus.

Thus, his abolition of the jizya (which could seldom be collected in rural areas where most Hindus lived) need not be read as a gesture of communal amity, but rather as a clever way of opening new tax channels to the rural masses through mostly Hindu tax collectors. He extracted a much larger revenue from Hindu tax-payers in the form of land tax or other secular formulas, than his predecessors had managed to do through the jizya. And it is through Akbar's tax collecting system that Aurangzeb would later collect his re-instituted jizya.

On the Hindu side too, things are not always what they seem, and some reputations for Hindu bravery deserve some reconsideration, precisely because on closer scrutiny, they were "Hindus wielding the sword of Islam". Thus, Guru Govind Singh declared in his Zafar-nama ("victory letter", though there is nothing victorious about its superficially defiant but basically toadyist contents) that like Aurangzeb, he too was an idol-breaker. In spite of the RSS veneration for Govind Singh and his "sword-arm of Hinduism", the germ of Sikh separatism and the islamization of Sikhism was already in evidence in his words and deeds. The Marathas started as Hindu freedom fighters, but ended as bullies to the Rajputs, Jats and Sikhs, and as vassals of the Moghuls. The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj wanted to defend Hinduism against Christian and Islamic aggression, but started by attacking the elements in Hinduism which contrasted most with Christianity and Islam (polytheism, idol-worship), and promoted their Christian-Islamic counterparts instead.

What about the Sangh?

Where Hindus have an acute problem with Muslims or Islam, they tend to vote BJP except where they have tougher alternatives. Yet, the record does not bear out the deduction that the BJP must be quite an anti-Muslim party. It will never initiate any policies specifically targeting the Muslims (such as the unkept promise of a crackdown on Bangladeshi infiltrators) except in an externally provoked Hindu-Muslim crisis of major proportions, i.e. a genuine armed Muslim uprising,-- but

under such circumstances most non-BJP governments would take similar positions.

Contrary to certain impressions created in the media, the BJS-BJP and RSS leaders have a heartfelt desire to woo the Muslims. The present official position of the RSS (and a fortiori of the BJP) is, more than ever, that Islam itself is quite alright, only fundamentalism is wrong. Even the well-known secularist theory that the Hindu-Muslim conflict was merely a concoction of the wily British colonizers is often repeated in RSS publications, sometimes with the addition that Congress and other secularist parties have now assumed the divisive role which the British once played. In every case, the role of the intrinsic hostility which Islam itself preaches and practises against "idolatry" is downplayed or kept out of the picture.

It is easy to establish that the Sangh is not preparing but rather avoiding any confrontation with Islam. The BJP and other Hindu organizations do perceive militant Islam as a genuine threat to Hindu society: "It is being realized by all democratic countries that today the greatest threat to world peace emanates from Islamic fundamentalism." [1] But though the claim of an actual consensus in the democratic countries is exaggerated, this is hardly an original or outlandish observation. Among the many who made similar remarks, we may mention former NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes, who said in early 1995 that militant Islam may be about to replace Communism as the global threat claiming the vigilance (and hence justifying the existence) of NATO.

A few RSS authors do expect a confrontation between Islam and other powers, and some have even brought in Samuel Huntingdon's well-known theory of the "Clash of Civilizations". [2] Mostly, the thrust of this line of thought is not to predict a Hindu-Muslim confrontation, but a conflict between Islam and the West. The Hindutva audience likes this a lot, for the same reason why it is so fond of astrological predictions that India will become a Hindu state in the near future: Huntingdon's predicted clash between Islam and the West would make things easy for the Hindus, viz. by taking the pressure off India. Hindus often translate Huntingdon-type predictions as: "the West will take care of Islam" -- meaning that for all their apprehensions about the rising power of Islam, Hindus will not need to do anything themselves. This type of discourse confirms that many Hindus are profoundly uncomfortable with the Islamic presence in and around India, yet they do not consider themselves to be the rock in the storm on which victory against Islam depends. But the Hindutva forces are not content to just dream of third parties eliminating the Islam problem. They also actively counter those in India who want to get serious about uprooting Islam. The BJP goes out of its way to assure everyone that it has no bad feelings towards Islam as such, e.g.: "To oppose Islamic fundamentalism does not mean to oppose Islam, which like all other major faiths is a religion of love, peace and brotherhood." [3] It strongly discourages those within its own ranks who want to face the Islam problem squarely. The BJP government of Delhi has refused to cancel judicial proceedings initiated by its secularist predecessors against Voice of India for the publication *Understanding Islam through Hadis* by Ram Swarup. In fact, the Sangh tries to blunt the sword of those who take on Islam, and thereby effectively defends Islam.

Even in the RSS weeklies, while the case against Islamic "fundamentalism" inside and outside of India is documented and argued week after week (nowadays mostly in the well-written columns of

V.P. Bhatia and Muzaffer Hussain), criticism of Islam itself is extremely rare. When in the 1980s the historian Sita Ram Goel filled a weekly column in *Organiser* with mustering evidence for his position that fundamentalist intolerance is the essence of Islam itself rather than a deviation, RSS General Secretary H.V. Seshadri intervened to have the column discontinued and the editor, the arch-moderate K.R. Malkani, sacked. The reason given for the discontinuation was that "otherwise, with such attacks on Islam, the Muslims will not join us". The same reason was given by the BJS leadership when asking Balraj Madhok to leave the party, in 1973, "on the grounds that since Muslims had become allergic to me they would not join the party".[4]

It is hard to conceive of a situation where a society is vexed and tortured by a persistent enemy, then generates a millions-strong organization pledged to the defence of this society, and yet this organization, this boastful "vanguard", fails to produce even the most sketchy analysis of the motives and methods of this enemy. Only Hindus could fare this badly. Fifty years after the Partition, twenty-six years after the East Bengal genocide, there are still Hindus singing mendacious refrains like *Ram Rahim Ek Hai* and "equal truth of all religions", because their supposed leaders have never bothered to inform them. A large part of the reason is to be found in specific choices made by the Sangh leadership, most of all the choice to seek secular respectability by means of appeasement policies including flattery of Mohammed and Islam.

Now that the Sangh exists, many activist Hindus gravitate towards it, but otherwise they would have set up their own shops and worked for Hinduism according to their own lights rather than follow the Sangh party-line. I am sure that in that case, the ideological struggle against Islam would have been waged much more vigorously, because most normally intelligent people consider it obvious that the existence of a problem warrants an investigation of its causes, i.e., that the suffering of Hindu society under Islamic aggression urgently warrants scrutiny of the doctrine and historical models underlying the characteristic behaviour pattern of Islam. By deliberately suppressing this perfectly natural ideological mobilization of the Hindus against Islam, the Sangh has effectively acted as Islam's first line of defence.

[1] Foreign Policy Resolutions, p.5 (1995).

[2] V.P. Bhatia: "The coming clash of civilisations", *Organiser*, 18-25/2/1996. I myself was invited by the Deendayal Research Institute to speak on this theme (February 1995).

[3] Foreign Policy Resolutions, p.5 (1995).

[4] That at least is Madhok's own version, see Balraj Madhok: "A Question of Power", *Indian Express*, 29 October 1995.

# 19. How not to deal with Islam

When dealing with Islam, it is crucially important to keep in mind the distinction between Islam as a doctrine and the Muslims, a group of people who were born or tricked into an Islamic environment. There is nothing intrinsically Islamic about human beings, not even when they are named Mohammed or Aisha.

In Europe, the secularist Left accuses the mushrooming national-populist and xenophobic parties of a "biologization of cultural differences". When the said parties plead that they have put "racism" behind them, that they have nothing against coloured people or foreigners per se, and that they only fear for social disharmony as a consequence of the co-existence of European and immigrant cultures, their opponents rightly argue that this implies a belief in the permanent character of people's cultural identity. By assuming that immigrant foreigners are bound to remain culturally foreign, the xenophobes treat cultural identity as if it were a racial characteristic: a permanent and hereditary trait. In reality, of course, cultural identities change, e.g. most second-generation Hindu immigrants have moved rather closely towards the mainstream culture of their adopted countries. Cultural identity including religion is not a permanent or hereditary trait.

Yet, in India, the secularist Left, always ready to take stands directly opposed to what counts internationally as secular, insists that the Muslim cultural identity is a permanent fact of life with which Hindus will have to co-exist in perpetuity. Just as whites are bound to remain white and blacks are certain to remain black, Muslims are bound to remain Muslim, and Hindus just have to learn to live with them. (The implication that Hindus should remain Hindu, however, does not apply: any criticism of conversion of Hindus to Islam or Christianity is either condemned or ridiculed.)

This secularist "biologization of Islam" is also assumed, quite mindlessly, by most supposedly Hindu organizations. Their schemes for solving the communal problem are entirely within the framework of Hindu-Muslim co-existence: first there are the Hindu and the Muslim community, and next we have to find a way to make them co-exist. The harder they try to be secular, the more they reduce the Islam problem to one of co-existence with a community which is somehow different, though the nature of that difference is emphatically not up for analysis. Not one bad word will they say about Islam, even though it is Islam and nothing else which separates the Indian Muslims from their fellow Indians, and even though the problem of how to integrate the Muslims into the Hindutva identity constantly occupies their minds.

This approach is politically counterproductive, as we shall argue, and it is unhistorical in its acceptance of Islam on a par with Hinduism. Firstly, Hinduism is a civilization in its own right, developed as mankind's answer to certain questions and problems, both practical and profound, but Islam is merely a reactive phenomenon, generally destructive of (and at best parasitic on) ancient and genuine civilizations. Secondly, in India's religious landscape, the Indian Muslim community is but a fairly recent addition cut out of the flesh of Hindu society.

Moreover, this approach of shielding Islam from critical enquiry is unfair to Islam by emphatically ignoring Islam's own self-definition as a religion based on a truth claim, viz. that "there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is Allah's prophet", a truth claim which can and must be evaluated as either true or false.

Finally, this non-doctrinal approach to the Muslim community creates the impression (gleefully picked up by the legions of communalism-watchers out to blacken Hindu society and its defenders) of a purely xenophobic motivation, similar to that of anti-foreigner parties in the West. Xenophobic parties in the West are faced with the problem that the country which they claim for their own nation is "invaded" by an outsider population which they cannot or will not assimilate. The cadres of these parties are often ideologues of ethnic or racial purity who do not want to assimilate Blacks or North-Africans or Turks, just as their grandfathers once rejected the assimilation of Jews. The recent electoral growth of these parties is, by contrast, mainly due to working-class people who have assimilated immigrant labour (Italians, Poles) before, but who now find that certain new immigrant groups (particularly Muslims) in their neighbourhoods cultivate their separateness. They fear that, against their own wish, they can not assimilate these separatist newcomers, and that their children will be faced with a civil war. Either way, the starting-point of these xenophobic parties is the separateness or non-assimilation of foreigner populations, and their "only solution" is to send these immigrants (and their children and grandchildren) back to their countries of origin.

In India, most Muslims are not immigrants even in the tenth generation, but otherwise the mistake made by their opponents is the same as in Europe: accepting the Muslimness of these Muslims as an unshakable basic fact which any policy must take into account.

The best example of this alleged similarity is the common complaint about the Islamic birth rate. On the Hindutva fringe, there are pamphlets which falsely cite the World Health Organization as having established that within twenty years or so, Muslims will be the majority in India. More serious publications, including *Organiser* and *BJP Today*, report a slower but nonetheless impressive increase in the Muslim percentage of India's population, recorded in every decadal census since 1881, and projected to continue at an even faster rate in the coming decades. In essence, this picture is correct: the percentage of Muslims shows a persistent increase at the expense of the Hindu percentage, with the rate of increase itself increasing. Given the higher Hindu participation in the birth control effort of the 1960s and 70s, we must now be witnessing a cumulative effect, of a proportionately smaller number of Hindu mothers (born in that period) having in their turn each a smaller number of children than the proportionately larger number of Muslim mothers, on average. On top of the higher birth rate of Muslims within the Indian Union, there is the dramatic influx of millions upon millions of Bangladeshis and also some Pakistanis.

The fact that in 1991 the Indian government has chosen to replace a real census count of religious adherence with an estimate is itself an indication that the Muslim percentage is now rising at an alarming rate. In fact, the estimate was demonstrably rigged. It shows a slight decrease in the rate at which the Muslim percentage increases: up by 0.52% between 1971 (11.21%) and 1981 (11.73%), up by 0.47% between 1981 and 1991 (12.20). However, all data about the Hindu-Muslim

differential in birth control and birth figures imply that the rate of Muslim increase is itself increasing, even without counting the estimated ten million Bangladeshi Muslims who entered India between 1981 and 1991.[1] On top of the native increase, we must add the figure of the said immigrants, which by itself amounts to more than 1% of India's population, twice as high as the total growth of the Muslim percentage as claimed by the Government. For once, I agree with Imam Bukhari, who has been saying for long that the Indian government systematically understates the number of Muslims in India. The total increase between 1981 and 1991 must be at least 1.5%. Assuming that the 1981 figure is correct, the 1991 figure is definitely higher than 13%, or at least 1% higher than the government claims.

So far, so good: the Sangh is right about the substantial increase in the Muslim percentage of the Indian population. A realistic projection into the future of present demographic (including migratory) trends does predict a Muslim majority in the Subcontinent by the mid-21st century, and a Muslim majority in the Indian Union by the turn of the 22nd century (in some regions much earlier). Though generally correct, this type of calculation is subject to an unkind comparison: the same type of projection occupies the minds of white racists in the USA. They expect that whites will cease to be the majority there by the mid-21st century, and they too are worried and unable to stem the tide. But there are two important differences.

The first one is that the non-whites in the USA do not or need not form a genuine problem for US whites, because people of different ethnic backgrounds can and do share in the same American Dream, can and do participate in a common American society. By contrast, Islam in India is intrinsically separatist and aiming for hegemony and ultimately for the destruction of Hinduism through conversion or otherwise. There is nothing intrinsically anti-white about blacks, but there is definitely something intrinsically anti-Hindu about Islam. For this reason, the concern of whites about the growth of non-white groups in the USA is reprehensible, but the concern of Hindus about the growth of Islam is entirely justified.

The second difference is that people's membership of certain racial groups, black or white or other, is unchangeable; while the potentially alarming adherence of people to Islam is entirely changeable. And it is at this last point that the BJP-cum-secularist acceptance of the Islamic identity of the Indian Muslims distorts the picture.

Like American white racists, BJP secularists are, in their heart of hearts, worried about the demographic increase of the minorities, but they don't want to admit it in so many words. Thus, in its 1996 Election Manifesto, the BJP warns that because of Bangladeshi infiltration, "various demographic entities are bound to come in conflict" due to "an alarming growth of a section of the population"; already, "a section of the population has grown by almost 100 per cent" in certain northeastern areas.[2] The BJP dooms itself to impotence by refusing to define the problem in its proper terms. Not wanting to sound anti-Muslim, the BJP avoids facing the "communal" angle, with the result that the Communist government in West Bengal cracks down on Hindu refugees and forces them back into Bangladesh, just to show the BJP what the asked-for crackdown on religiously undefined "Bangladeshi infiltrators" would mean in practice. Worse, even to the extent that the BJP does identify the problem as "illegal Bangladeshi Muslims", it dooms itself to an

unimaginative (and by now probably unrealistic) solution, viz. to physically push these people back across the border.[3]

This grudgingly admitted concern about the increasing Muslim presence, combined with the feeling of impotence to stop this ominous increase, leads to certain undesirable ideas, which you do not find in BJP or RSS publications, but which do come out in more extreme pamphlets of fringe groups and in unrecorded conversations. One such idea is that birth control should be made compulsory, e.g. by enforcing vasectomy on every father of two children. Another idea in this category is that Hindus should reintroduce polygamy (as I read in a pamphlet by British NRIs). A third, propagated by the Puri Shankaracharya among others, is that Hindus should return to having as many children per woman as possible (quite like the natalist propaganda of xenophobic parties in Europe). A fourth is that all Indian Muslims should go to Pakistan, which was, after all, created for them ("Mussalman ke do hi sthan: Pakistan ya qabrastan"). In 1947 this was, coupled with an ordered evacuation of Hindus from Pakistan, an eminently sensible proposal which could have saved millions of lives (including those yet to be lost in future clashes resulting from Hindu-Muslim "co-existence" in India).[4] Today, however, it could only be done by means of extreme violence, comparable in intensity to (but a hundred times larger than) the full-scale civil war which preceded the expulsion of the French inhabitants of Algeria in 1962.

Hindutva men of the drinking kind utter such ideas in the late hours, when they are ashamed about their party's non-performance on the communal front and feel the need to strike a more martial profile. These are indeed drunkards' ideas. Within their scheme of things, the choice is one of simply letting the Muslims take over India as soon as they become numerous enough (which is well before they reach the 50% mark, e.g. Jinnah was offered the government by Gandhi when the Muslims were hardly 24% in undivided India); or implementing one of the said scenarios of demographic competition or ethnic cleansing. I cannot blame anti-Hindu authors for highlighting such ideas as all too similar to certain forms of xenophobia and racism elsewhere.

Thoughtful Hindus, by contrast, have no such problem. They don't rely on numbers but on consciousness, the secret weapon which will blow Islam away. Let the Indian Muslims "breed like rats": it is thanks to them that India will overtake China as the most populous country in the world (a doubtful honour in this age, but these millions may be needed one day). All that is needed to avert the catastrophe of a Muslim take-over, is that these numerous children of Muslim parents are properly educated.

It is a well-known fact that most South-Asian Muslims are the descendents of converts from Hinduism. As for the Turkish, Persian or Arabic components of the Muslim community, they too are the descendents of converts, be it from Buddhism or Zoroastrianism or some other Kafir religion. There is nothing intrinsically Muslim even about Arabs, who were the first victims of Islam. Islamic scripture itself is quite unambiguous about the terror which Mohammed and his companions used to pressurize the Arabs into joining them; and about the national Arab revolt against Islam after Mohammed's death, a war of liberation which they only lost because they did not resort to the same ruthless style of warfare which Mohammed had introduced. The people known as Muslims have walked into Islam, and they are bound to walk out again as well. Powerful as the

conditioning of Islamic indoctrination may be, it remains a superficial imposition susceptible to the law of impermanence. That is why any solution which starts by assuming the Muslimness of the Muslims, is mistaken.

[1] The clearest eye-opener is the birth-rate in the relatively affluent Muslim-majority district of Malappuram in highly-literate Kerala (see Baljit Rai: *Is India Going Islamic?*, p.103-106); at 75.22%, the female literacy rate in Malappuram is twice as high as for most Hindu communities in the Hindi belt. In the decade 1981-91 its population grew by 28.74%, well above the national average of 23.50% and more than twice the Kerala average of 13.98%. This disproves the usual excuse that the birth-rate automatically follows the poverty rate and the illiteracy rate. Most Hindu Scheduled Caste people whom I know have settled for smaller families, but by and large, Muslims have not changed their appetite for large families. Ever since the propagation of birth control among the Hindu masses, rich and literate Muslims have more children than poor and illiterate Hindus.

[2] BJP Election Manifesto 1996: *For a Strong and Prosperous India*, p.39. This is practically a parody of secularist riot reporting (where "Muslims burned a temple down" becomes "members of a particular community damaged a religious building").

[3] It is a different matter that the BJP state government in Delhi, voted to power in 1993 on a platform prominently including a crackdown on Bangladeshi infiltrators, has totally gone back on this promise.

[4] The chance to organize a peaceful and ordered exchange of population (not the optimum solution but certainly the lesser evil after Partition had been conceded), though proposed as early as 1940 by Dr. Ambedkar, was spurned by Gandhi and Nehru, who preferred to see the millions bleed rather than give up their dogma of a "composite culture". The 20th century AD has been full of enlightened leaders sacrificing millions of real human beings on the altar of ideological chimaeras.



# 20. How to deal with Islam

The "communal" problem is simple, and so is its solution. The root cause of communal riots, of the Partition with its nearly a million victims, and of the East Bengal genocide with its three million victims, is the Islamic doctrine of permanent hostility against the unbelievers.[1] As the Quran says: "Fight them until idolatry is no more and religion belongs to Allah alone" (2:193 and 8:39), and: "Enmity and hate shall reign between us until ye believe in Allah alone" (60:4). More than 70 passages in the Quran teach that non-Muslims are to be shunned and treated as enemies, that they are bound for hellfire, and that rulership in this and bliss in the next world is reserved for Muslims alone. This body of doctrine is further corroborated and enriched with like-minded statements and model acts of Mohammed and his companions, and systematized by theologians and jurists. The solution is obvious: remove the intrinsically communal and separatist doctrine of Islam from the minds of its misguided followers. Educate them so that they can laugh at the primitive beliefs which have held them captive for so long, just as adults can take a laugh at their own childhood illusions.

Sounds radical? This was the solution offered by the Arya Samaj, a progressive Hindu reform movement, which put the large-scale reconversion of Muslims to the Vedic tradition high on Hindu society's agenda. Its central doctrinal book, Swami Dayananda Saraswati's *Satyartha Prakash* (1875), contained the first Hindu vivisection of Islamic doctrine, still a bit clumsy but on the right track. The movement had its martyrs, several authors of publications on Islam and leaders of the reconversion movement killed by Muslim activists; but it never indulged in any similar forms of violence.

Indeed, frank debate on ideas is inversely proportionate with riots and bomb attacks. For this reason, the secularist editors and professors and politicians who suppress debate on the record and doctrines of Islam are among the chief culprits of India's communal conflagrations.[2] The BJP is making a grave mistake by actively and passively joining the "secular" (in Europe we would call it anti-secular) effort to shield Islam from rational investigation and informed debate. Instead, it should make and support every effort to expose Islam and break the spell it has cast on hundreds of millions of fellow Indians now known as Muslims.

Today, the liberation of the Muslims from Islam should be a top priority for all those who care about India's and the world's future. This is all the more obvious when we notice that in the Muslim world itself, many writers have stood up to publicize their break with Islam, and to show their brethren the way out of the religion which was forced on them by Mohammed and his companions. Some have done so from a newfound atheist conviction (e.g. Taslima Nasrin), others from a rediscovery of the ancient ever-young spirituality of the Vedic tradition (e.g. Anwar Shaykh). Given the intolerance for dissident opinions in the Muslim world, and given the actual spate of murders and murder attempts against fellow dissidents, each one of these apostates has had to muster far more courage than Sangh Parivar people will need when they finally speak up against Islam in the relative safety and freedom of secular India.

The case against Islam is not limited to its record of intolerance, aggression, persecution and barbarity. Quite apart from its violent self-righteousness and its anti-national attitudes, Islam is reprehensible for the more fundamental and more universal reason that it is not true. Most ancient religious traditions are not based on belief systems, e.g. though the theory of reincarnation has gained widespread popularity among Hindus, there is no law which excludes non-believers in reincarnation from the Hindu fold. Religions like Shinto or Taoism consist in a set of practices and ritual or ethical conventions, established as a practical framework of life within which people can exercise their freedom to seek spiritual upliftment; they are not based on a belief system. In contrast to these ancient communal religions, Christianity and Islam make a truth claim which is non-provable but must nonetheless be accepted and will be enforced with grim punishments in this world and the next.[3] It is meaningless to talk about these creedal religions without evaluating their central truth claims.

In the case of Islam, this creed is quite simple: There is no god except Allah, and Mohammed is the prophet of Allah. The first part may or may not be true, depending on the meaning of the terms. Like the Vaishnava term Bhagwan, "the sharer", effectively "the Lord", the Pagan-Arab term Allah (from al-Ilah, "the god", cfr. Hebrew Eloha/Elohim) seems to have been an inclusive term, subsuming every god in the Arab pantheon. But to read this meaning into the Islamic creed would be unhistorical: the whole of Islamic scripture is entirely consistent in denouncing the worship of any "other god" (or what a Vaishnava inclusive-monotheist might call: "God under any other name") as irreconcilable with the worship of Allah.[4] It necessarily implies hostility to Hinduism as long as Hindus do not worship Allah to the exclusion of all the Hindu gods and to the exclusion of non-theistic worldviews.

The second part of the Shahada, that Mohammed is Allah's prophet (assuming that Allah is the almighty Creator of the world), is decidedly untrue. First of all, it is entirely unproven. Every single sentence in the Quran can be explained from Mohammed's own socio-cultural background, like any perfectly human product. Someone rich ought to announce an award for anyone who can find in the Quran a single sentence which proves by its contents that the Almighty had dictated it. That is what rationalist associations do to expose quack exponents of the paranormal: award a hundred thousand dollars for whomever can demonstrate even a single paranormal fact under foolproof conditions (so far, no one ever collected the prize).

Allah is supposed to be omniscient. For such a Being it should be very easy to demonstrate some knowledge which is beyond the reach of ordinary human beings like Mohammed, say, being able in 620 AD to predict the events of 2000 AD, or to give the then-unknown chemical formula of water, or to write a then-unknown language including modern Arabic. This would not be proof of omniscience yet, but at least proof that the Quran is not the handiwork of an ordinary mortal; but nothing of the sort is done in the Quran. Moreover, the Quran contains many contradictions and inaccuracies, both in terms of modern physical and medical knowledge and in terms of its references to Biblical characters and events, e.g. mistaking Moses' sister Miriam for Jesus' mother Miriam/Mary, though there is a time-gap of more than twelve centuries between the two. The omniscient Allah, who claims to be the God of Abraham and Moses, had somehow forgotten the details of his interactions with the Hebrew prophets, and while confidently predicting the

Doomsday, He was ignorant of the scientific knowledge accumulated by mankind centuries before this Doomsday.

Mohammed's own contemporaries were almost unanimous in dismissing his "revelations" as anything but divine, though they disagreed on whether his problem was demonic possession (as is still taught by some Christian missionaries) or just his imagination run wild. Modern scholars have analyzed Mohammed's behaviour and "revelations" as typical symptoms of paranoia, while Swami Vivekananda opined that Mohammed suffered from the neuropathological effects of unguided yogic experiments.[5] At any rate, there is nothing God-given about the Quranic revelation. Islam stands or falls with Mohammed's prophethood. The entire Muslim law is based on it through its four pillars, either directly (Quran and Hadis, the lore about his model behaviour) or indirectly (Qiyas, or analogy of new situations with those in which Mohammed showed the way, and Ijma, the consensus of men well-versed in the former three). Those who are now Muslims will be free to replace Sharia laws with more humane laws once they emancipate themselves from their veneration for the man on whose words and acts the Sharia is based. Then alone will they be able in good conscience to drop their hostility to Hinduism. Moreover, then they themselves will opt for a Common Civil Code, and they themselves will turn the Kashi and Mathura mosques into temples of Shiva and Krishna, rather than have these changes forced on them by meddlesome Hindus. So, the Hindutva activists should replace the Common Civil Code and temple agitations, which claim things from the Muslims, with a campaign to reclaim the Muslims themselves, or at least to emancipate them from the grip of Islamic doctrine and leave them free to choose a more humane spiritual path for themselves.

[1] The victims of the Pakistani repression in East Bengal in 1971 (of whom the big majority were Hindus, while the Bengali Muslims too were killed for anti-Hindu reasons, viz. for being "half-Hindu renegades"), like those of the Sultanate and Moghul regimes, have never been properly counted; careerwise, it is suicidal for a scholar to calculate the magnitude of Islam's crimes against humanity. The figure of 3 million is probably too high, but as it was given by a Muslim secularist (Bangladesh founder Mujibur Rahman), and as the secularists themselves have thrown their full weight against a proper study of the magnitude of Islamic massacres of Hindus, they cannot fault us for provisionally sticking to it.

[2] You wouldn't guess it from their polished convent-school English, their trendy terminology, or their sanctimoniousness, but the likes of Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib or Gyanendra Pandey have blood on their hands. The wave of Muslim violence after the Ayodhya demolition (and the boomerang of police repression and Shiv Sena retaliation) was at least partly due to the disinformation by supposed experts who denied that the disputed building had a violent iconoclastic prehistory, and implied that Hindus can get away with concocted history in their attacks on innocent mosques. This disinformation gave Muslim militants the sense of justification needed to mount a "revenge" operation and to mobilize decent Muslims for acts of violence which they never would have committed if they had known the truth about Islam's guilt in Ayodhya.

[3] In this context, I want to caution against the imprecise use of the term "Semitic" when referring to the Prophetic-monotheistic religions. Apart from being tainted by the related term "anti-Semitic",

it is also hopelessly inaccurate. Judaism (which is linguistically "Semitic" in that its basic texts are in Hebrew and Aramaic) is a communal religion just like Hinduism and most tribal and traditional religions, not a creedal one like Christianity and Islam. The Semitic peoples including the Arabs until the 7th century AD and the early Israelites were heathens worshipping goddesses in sacred groves and the like. The founding texts of Christianity were written in Greek, a non-Semitic language. Monotheism was brought into Judaism by Moses, culturally an Egyptian, and had already been briefly imposed on the Egyptians by Pharaoh Ekhnaton.

[4] Allah is given "one hundred names", or rather Arabic epithets, but this does not mean that Isis or Apollo or Shiva will do just as well. The non-Quranic Persian god-name Khuda did admittedly manage to sneak into Muslim parlance; but it is no coincidence that with the increasing grip of the theologians on public life in Iran and Pakistan, this term is being phased out in favour of "Allah", e.g. Khuda hafiz, "God preserve you" (for "goodbye") is being replaced on Pakistani television by Allah hafiz.

[5] See Swami Vivekananda: Complete Works, vol.1, p.184. The psychopathological thesis on Mohammed has been developed in great detail by Dr. Herman Somers: Een andere Mohammed (Dutch; Hadewijch, Antwerp 1992).

# 21. Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free

The struggle against Islamic aggression cannot be won without taking issue with the basic doctrines of Islam, i.e. explaining to the Muslims that they have no reason to stay with the refuted dogmas of Islam. The same is true for Christianity. The Sangh Parivar has made much ado about the Christian demand for reservations for "Christian Dalits", and about continuing Christian proselytization in tribal areas. It is, however, impossible to sustain this objection against the strategies of evangelization as long as Christianity is accepted as a valid religion qualified to enjoy the Hindus' sarva-dharma-samabhava. Why in the world should Indian citizens not embrace Christianity if it is true, at least "equally true" with Hinduism? Especially now that Christianity in India has largely "indianized" itself in its cultural expressions (e.g. by giving Hindu first names to their children), the Sangh should not object to conversions to Christianity.

Being a Christian implies accepting a creed, i.e. an unprovable truth claim. The Christian denominations differ on some points of detail, but crucial to any criterion for being a Christian is the acceptance of the following item of belief: Jesus was the Christ/Messiah and saved mankind from original sin through his death and resurrection. To my knowledge, all denominations with active missions in India also teach that Jesus Christ was God's only-begotten son, both human and divine in nature.[1] However, modern Bible scholarship, much of it carried out by Christians, has conclusively refuted all the Christian fairy-tales about Jesus.[2] For example:

\* Contrary to his own self-image, Jesus was not the messiah in the original sense of the term, i.e. a scion of King David's clan who restores the Davidic kingdom. He never scored any political or military victory for his country, and by the end of his career, Israel was still under foreign domination. For all we know, Jesus did not even belong to the House of David; if he did, it is a mystery why the evangelists had to indulge in such demonstrably false and contradictory stories about Jesus' genealogy and birth.

\* Jesus was not executed by the Jews but by the Romans because of his entirely hollow but strictly speaking seditious claim that he was the "messiah", i.e. the new king of the Jews, intrinsically a challenge to Roman rule in his country (but not an act of blasphemy liable to the death sentence under Jewish law, as wrongly alleged in the Gospel). The Gospel version that the Jews wanted him dead (when in fact they merely held him in contempt as a useless and self-centred eccentric) was invented when the Christians tried to be on the winning side during the Roman crackdown on the Jewish revolt of ca. 70 AD. This move set the trend of two millennia of Church opportunism and it off-hand initiated Christian antisemitism with its numerous pogroms culminating in the Holocaust.

\* Jesus was not the messiah in the Christian-theological sense, i.e. the redeemer of mankind from original sin and from its punishments (as per Genesis), viz. mortality, the need to work, and painful

childbirth. Anyone can see that people have gone on sinning, giving birth in agony, eating the fruit of their labour in the sweat of their brows, and dying; just like they did before Jesus.

\* Jesus was not resurrected, for if he had really "conquered death", he would still be with us. The apostles tried to get around this simple logic by inventing his direct ascension to heaven, an imaginary event totally incoherent with the whole narrative, rendered necessary only by the fact that Jesus proved mortal like the rest of us. Fact is that the stories about the resurrection in the Gospels are full of contradictions and absurdities, like most of the theologically crucial episodes.

\* Jesus was not God's only-begotten son, and for all his megalomania, he never even claimed to be that. The whole notion is a mix-up of the worst in Hebrew monotheism (exclusivism) and Greek paganism (idolizing of human beings as divine), and is absurd from the viewpoint of both these traditions in their pure forms. Like the crucifixion, it was "a scandal to Jews, a nonsense to Greeks", and an invention of the Church Fathers.[3]

\* Jesus was not even a prophet, in the sense of being able to predict the future. Like his follower Paul, he predicted the impending end of the world (even within the lifetime of his listeners),-- surely a failed prophecy.

\* Jesus' ethics were mostly not his, but included classical Jewish lore ("love thy neighbour") and general proverbs ("to him who hath, shall be given"). Some of "his" words were put into his mouth retrospectively by the evangelists, e.g. "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's", a diplomatic kowtow to the Romans. The words which he really spoke himself are either not original or not commendable. Thus, the humane doctrine of the relativity of the Law (i.e. that the need to save a human life can overrule a commandment), always presented as a revolutionary innovation, was taught by the very Pharisees against whom Jesus is reported to have preached this doctrine. As against the Pharisees' balanced view of the Law, Jesus vacillated between a pseudo-noble but inhuman hyper-adherence to the law ("even a man who mentally lusts after a woman is guilty of adultery") and a nihilistic dismissal of the Law and even of sheer common sense as having become irrelevant in view of the impending Doomsday ("don't plan for the morrow", like the lilies in the field). Jesus' original contribution lies mostly in the least commendable injunctions, e.g. in his very un-Jewish anti-family and anti-sexuality statements, in the commandment of surrender to the aggressor ("when slapped, turn the other cheek"), and in the morbid Sermon on the Mount ("the meek shall inherit the earth"), which teaches the weak to exult in their weakness instead of exhorting them to become strong.

This was merely a brief survey of the case against Christianity, but Hindutva activists who are serious about countering Christian subversion ought to familiarize themselves more thoroughly with these findings. Similarly, the case against Islam as marshalled in a number of quality books is required reading for anyone who prefers India not to become an Islamic state.[4] Hindus may rightly feel more drawn to critiques of Christianity and Islam from a spiritual viewpoint, as those by Ram Swarup, than to purely rationalistic critiques; yet, I feel that taking cognizance of the latter's very thorough and comprehensive analysis of these religions would certainly be worth the effort. After properly digesting the hard scholarly facts, they may add something which most scholars may

be unaware of, and which Hinduism offers: a comprehensive vision which allows for a meaningful type of ritual and spiritual practice to continue after the creedal religions have been discarded.

If the Sangh is serious about saving Hinduism, it should make sure that from now on, no one can get away with pious nonsense like Jesus' Resurrection or Quranic Revelation. Every time a wily secularist or sentimental Ramakrishnaist stands up to praise Jesus or Mohammed, every time an Indian President or Minister opens a Christian or Islamic function with the injunction that "we should all put Jesus' (c.q. Mohammed's) message of peace and tolerance into practice", Hindus should push the facts under his nose.

[1] One of the most bizarre disputes in religious history is the fragmentation of the early Church in sects divided by their doctrines concerning the nature of Jesus. Some "heresies" marginally surviving in the Middle East teach that Jesus was but a non-divine human being, others that he was exclusively divine and not human, but the mainstream (after bloody persecutions of the others) decided that Jesus had two natures, divine and human.

[2] For a start, I suggest all the Hindutva workers dealing with Christian missionaries read Michael Arnheim's excellent book *Is Christianity True?* (Duckworth, London 1984), and of course the Voice of India publications on Christianity.

[3] According to the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, the source of the Indian Church's claim that the apostle Thomas came to India and was martyred near Chennai, Thomas was Jesus' twin-brother, which ought to create a problem for the dogma of the "only-begotten son".

[4] A truly great book in this class, written by a born Muslim, is Ibn Warraq: *Why I Am Not a Muslim* (Prometheus, New York 1995).

## 22. Hindu objections

A Hindu policy of ideological confrontation with hostile religions is necessary for the survival of India as an essentially Hindu country. After having flattered Christianity and Islam for several centuries, Hindus inside and outside the Sangh may come up with many objections against such a policy. As a BJP man once told me: "When we attack Christianity, it is not the Christians who leave us -- they are not with us anyway --, it is the Hindus who won't vote for us." This much is certainly true, that the rotten sentimentalism of "equal truth of all religions" has gone fairly deep into the Hindu psyche. Before explaining anything to Christians and Muslims, the true story must be explained to Hindus, whose obstinate self-deception is the greatest obstacle to Hindu liberation. While Muslims consider it only logical that non-Muslims disbelieve Islam's defining dogmas, Hindus can get quite indignant when someone dares to say that the Islamic creed is wrong (more than when he scolds and ridicules Hinduism).

One argument reluctant Hindus will come up with, is that it is pretentious to tell other people that they are wrong, as if any of us has a monopoly on the truth. This is a case of Hindus getting angry at the sliver in their own eye but ignoring the beam in the enemy's eye. It is not Hinduism but Islam and Christianity which have started the game of telling others that they are wrong. If Hindus must enter this confrontation, it is because the confrontation is already taking place, though with only one side actually fighting.

The meaning of: "There is no God except Allah", is precisely that all Hindus and all other non-Muslims are wrong when they worship Shiva or Amon-Ra or Wodan. Actually, it goes much farther than that: its full doctrinal implication is that those who worship any other God (or no God at all) are doomed: doomed to servility and rightlessness in this world and eternal hellfire in the next. By contrast, critics of Islam merely assert that believers in Islam are mistaken, without any further ado. The ancient believers in a flat earth were mistaken too, yet they are not suffering in hell for that. Erring is human, the fact of being proven wrong does not give your critics the right to take your property, to enslave you, to deny you full citizenship or public display of your religion. Muslims should not be punished for being deluded about Mohammed's megalomaniacal claims (the way their religion wants to punish us with jihad and hellfire for not sharing this delusion), they should on the contrary be helped to make a new start.

Hindus are mistaken when they assume that proving someone wrong implies a claim to final truth. Look at it with the eyes of science. It is a fact that responsible scientists will hesitate to declare a theory to be absolutely true. Thus, Newton's mechanics seemed to be fully proven, and it was, but only for objects moving at moderate speed. Once objects moving at extremely high speeds were taken into account, the theory broke down and a more sophisticated theory was required, viz. Einstein's relativity theory. This way, with every broadening of our horizon, even the most well-proven theory may ultimately be shown to be deficient. Instead of achieving truth, we merely create milestones of better theories on the way to an ever-distant goal of absolute scientific truth, possibly an unreachable goal which we can only approximate asymptotically. The exotic world of quantum



physics has even discovered phenomena which cannot be adequately described by one theory, but need two seemingly contradictory theories to describe their behaviour (as wave or as particle). Granted, the notion of objective truth has become more complex and more elusive than optimistic but naive Enlightenment philosophers thought.[1]

And yet, no matter how cautious and even relativistic philosophers of science have become vis-à-vis the truth claims of science, they still take for granted that we can prove a theory wrong, definitively wrong. The theory that dewdrops are tears fallen from the moon cannot withstand empirical tests. To assert that water when heated becomes ice, would be wrong; it would not just be "different" or "differently valid", but downright wrong, definitively disproven. In mathematics, certain equations can be formulated for which there is no solution, or several solutions at the same time, but all the same, the equation " $2 + 2 = 3$ " is and remains unambiguously wrong. Eventhough the search for the truth will go on for a long time to come, any truth claims proven wrong can now already be discarded. Rightness may be elusive, but wrongness is quite straightforward. I may hesitate to pronounce an opinion on whether Vedanta is right, but I can now already say that the defining truth claims of Christian and Islamic doctrine stand disproven.

Christianity and Islam are wrong in their central truth claims and can immediately be discarded. Humanity has lived without these pretentious doctrines for long, and it is a matter of mathematical certainty that it will resume doing so. The question is only how much damage they will be allowed to add to their record before expiring.

Gandhi used to compare Hinduism and Islam with an older and a younger brother, respectively. His effective interpretation of this simile was that the older brother should passively suffer any whim of the younger brother, which is neither realistic nor educationally advisable. The simile is alright, but its realistic implication is that the older brother should help the younger brother to outgrow his childish ways. If he has wisdom and fellow-feeling, he will take into consideration the difficulties attending all transition processes. This leads to a somewhat nobler kind of objection which I expect some Hindus to raise: think of the complete revolution which de-islamization or de-christianization will mean for the people concerned! With their commendable conservatism, Hindus are wary of the damage which revolutions tend to cause.

Jesus and Mohammed and their front soldiers never cared much about the upheaval and destruction they wrought; but we need not stoop to their level. As much as possible, the emancipation of Muslims and Christians from their belief systems should be an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process. First of all, most customs and rituals and other externals need not be tampered with, for they are not what makes these religions objectionable. Ex-Catholics can continue to venerate the Madonna, who is but a christianized version of Isis with babe Horus (and similar mother-goddesses) anyway. Ex-Muslims can continue to pray five times a day, to watch their handpalms while praying, to go on pilgrimage to Mecca (a pre-islamic institution)[2], to fast for a month per year (preferably fixed in early spring)[3], and to wear goat-beards. These customs are as good as any other. It should be made clear to them that Hinduism has room for these customs and rituals, that its objection is only to God's Only-Begotten Son and Allah's Final Prophet. All they have to do is get rid of Jesus and Mohammed, and the communal problem will disappear.

Many people have argued that Muslims cannot convert to Hinduism because no one will want to marry their children: for Muslims, they are apostates, and for Hindus, the fact that they have declared themselves converts to Hinduism does not make them members of the appropriate caste. Christian missionaries used to have this problem in reverse when they tried to lure individual Hindus into Christianity. Their solution was to convert entire communities within a short time, so that people could go on intermarrying within their own community after conversion. To the extent that caste endogamy persists, this is indeed the most practical solution; both the Arya Samaj and the VHP claim to have achieved several communal conversions of this type.[4]

With the modern media and modern education, it should not be difficult to reach the Muslims and Christians by the millions. Once the exodus has started, every emigrant from the faith will persuade his friends and relatives, and it will become a mass movement, bringing across whole communities. In fact, now already there is a high number of nominal Muslims who have become skeptical of the claims of Islam, but who think it wiser in the circumstances to keep quiet about their convictions. Ultimately it is they themselves who have to break free, but Hindus can certainly help in creating the proper climate.

In spite of all the sensitivity which you can bring to this, a certain amount of shock will remain unavoidable when Muslims or Christians come to realize that they have believed in fairy-tales for all these years. Imagine you are a mullah, highly specialized in Sharia jurisprudence, and suddenly you realize that this whole Sharia is based on the "model behaviour" of an unimportant individual who lived in a distant country long ago, and whose knowledge was far too limited to guide us in the problems which we are facing today, even apart from the mental problem which further distorted his already limited vision. Your status suddenly crumbles, you feel like you have wasted the best years of your life, you come down to earth and you have to start from scratch. It is like the situation of professors of Marxism-Leninism in the former Soviet Bloc, who in 1989 found that their knowledge had become totally useless overnight.

Dr. Herman Somers, the Flemish ex-Jesuit who made a psychopathological analysis of both Jesus and Mohammed, relates how he discovered through his pioneering Bible studies that "Christianity was a mistake".[5] It was a painful process to realize that he had wasted so much time on Christian theology, a purely imaginary science, and that he had sacrificed so much to his commitments as a Jesuit. At the same time, it was a liberation, which had come "better late than never". Millions of people in Europe can testify that outgrowing Christian beliefs has been a liberation.

I am afraid I sound like a Christian missionary when I say that we should help Muslims and Christians out of their religions because we love them. The expression sounds patronizing, but there is nothing I can do about it: the insight in the wrongness of the Christian and Islamic dogmas just happens to be a more advanced stage of knowledge than the belief in their rightness. Therefore, we help Christians and Muslims on the way forwards when we make them question the dogmas of their religion. The unbelievers are the elder brother, the believers the younger brother. And it does show concern and love for our fellow-men when we help them to outgrow their delusions.

What, then, is the difference with Francis Xavier who came to free the Indian Pagans from

Hinduism "because he loved them so much" (as Catholic story-books claim)? If we make abstraction from the violent methods which Francis Xavier used and which I reckon Hindus will never resort to, we may concede that subjectively, it is the same thing: he thought he was doing something good for the Hindus when he converted them to Christianity. But objectively, the crucial difference remains that he converted them into a delusion, while Dr. Somers (through his demythologizing books) has converted people out of a delusion.

Here again, we find that the question of truth cannot be avoided. It makes little sense to discuss relations with Christianity and Islam without evaluating their truth claims. When their propagandists brandish the values with which superficial Hindus have identified them (charity and egalitarian brotherhood, respectively), we can readily concede the desirability of these values, but we must point out that these values do not add up to being a Christian or a Muslim; for that, assent to the dogmas is necessary. Charity and brotherhood have been in existence for a long time, and we need not fear for their disappearance when the last believers free themselves from the religions which falsely claim these virtues as their very own contribution. No matter how laudable charity is, that does not make Jesus Christ the Messiah. No matter how badly Hindus need an increased sense of brotherhood, that does not make the Quran a divine revelation. Another objection could be that religion, any religion, is bound up with ethics, and that people will lose their ethics once they lose their religion. In my lifetime I've heard this argument used any number of times in defence of Christianity, yet the ex-Christians who make up the majority of my generation in my country are generally not worse people than their Christian grandparents were. Yet, to support this argument, people in India as well as in Muslim countries are sure to point to the West as a resounding illustration of the kind of decadence which inevitably follows the loss of religion. It is true that many people have been freed from their Christian inhibitions only to dive deeply into hedonism and consumerism, and that some lost souls in the cities have abandoned their civic sense, their respect for life and property, and their sexual morality along with their Christian beliefs. If anyone should be blamed for this, we should not forget the responsibility of Christian clerics who have propagated the notion that Christianity and morality are equivalent (the identification of their new Christian belief with age-old values being a trick to give Christianity more respectability among prospective converts)[6], and that fear of punishment in the hereafter is the only way to keep people on the right path.

The challenge before responsible people in regions where people lose the faith in large numbers, is to guide the masses in rediscovering their natural religiosity and their natural sense of ethics, to rebuild what Christianity has destroyed but was unable to replace in the long run. To quite an extent, this is already happening, and it goes without saying that Asian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism) are providing the main though not the only guiding light. The loss of belief in Christ or Mohammed does not mean the loss of the religious feeling, on the contrary. Indeed, the often rationalist argumentation of the Arya Samaj's shuddhi activists was never meant to free Muslims and Christians from religion altogether, but to make them more accessible for the Vedic message. Yes, there is life after Christianity and Islam, even an ethical and religious life. In the West right now, there is a tremendous religious seeking, people groping in the dark but usually ending up with the great traditions from Asia in a suitably adapted form.

In the case of Indian Muslims and Christians, such a development would be entirely logical, though I can imagine that many Muslims who see themselves as the progeny of Central-Asian conquerors would opt for alternatives to mainstream Hinduism, such as Buddhism or Zoroastrianism (both of which are going through a remarkable revival in the Altaic-speaking and Iranian-speaking parts of the former Soviet Union). That is quite alright, for what is needed is a struggle for religious freedom against dogmatic belief systems; not trying to pull them into your own shop but encouraging them to find out for themselves.

A very optimistic objection could be that Hindu society need not bother about Christianity and Islam, because the thrust of their historical aggression against Hinduism is weakening and will weaken further in the future. It has happened before: while Communists were plotting the death of Hinduism and the dismemberment of India, the Hindutva movement did very little to counter Communism, yet Communism collapsed under its own failures in its very stronghold. Christianity has suffered major losses in America and staggering losses in Europe, and even Islam which now seems such a formidable steamroller may be undermined by emerging freethinkers from among its own ranks. One day, Hindus may wake up and find that the missionaries have left, the petrodollars gone, the mosques turned into goshalas, who knows?

Unfortunately, luck does not usually come to those who count on luck to save them. The circumstances in South Asia, barring a Hindu awakening, are quite encouraging for anti-Hindu predators. As the late Girilal Jain once told me, "nothing ever dies in India", and I could well imagine a situation of Islam and Christianity dying out in their homelands while thriving in India (cfr. Communism which is more alive in Calcutta and JNU than in Beijing let alone Moscow). Of course, the ultimate disappearance of untenable belief systems is a mathematical certainty, but before they go, they can still do tremendous damage to the continuity of Hindu tradition. Look at Nepal, till recently entirely Hindu-Buddhist, and how Islamic infiltrators and Christian missionaries are fast changing the religious landscape there.

In Hindutva publications, I read triumphal reports about Hindu reconversions in tribal areas, but to me they sound like the blustering triumphalism of the Marathas before the battle of Panipat. Indeed, other people working in tribal areas tell me that the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram and like-minded initiatives, in spite of their sincere and commendable efforts, just can't compete with the well-organized and heavily financed Christian missions. The Organiser itself recently carried a headline: "Conversion assumes alarming proportions".[7] Whatever their problems in the West, the missionaries can still do tremendous damage to the continuity of Hindu tradition and to the fabric of the Indian state.

Some people object that what we need is not the conversion of Muslims and Christians to a native religion, but simply the dilution of their fanaticism. They point to a few Christian theologians who follow the vogue in certain Western theological faculties, which is to assert that all religions are part of God's salvation plan. In practice: let's leave them to their deluded faith in imaginary divine revelations and only-begotten sons, as long as they stop attacking us.

First of all, I have my doubts about the acceptance of these deluded faiths, even if they are not

immediately harmful to third parties. Though the Bahai sect is not persecuting people, the belief in the Mohammed-like pretensions of its founders (along with the continued belief in Jesus' and Mohammed's prophethood) remains a profoundly sad mistake, one in which I cannot want my fellow-men to remain entrapped. In the Vedic phrase, "let us ennoble the world", let us not leave areas of darkness shielded off against the light.

Secondly, I do not see much of this softening in the Indian chapters of Christianity and Islam. Apologists like Rafiq Zakaria and Asghar Ali Engineer like to present a human face of Islam, but they do so simply by lying and by concealing and denying the hard facts of Islamic Scripture and history; they never make any concession or show any sympathy for other religions and for the plight of the persecuted Hindus in Islamic states and provinces. Even those few Muslims who are sincerely trying to redefine Islam as a tolerant faith carry no conviction: their tolerant version of Islam can never be more than an unstable transitory phase, either out of Islam altogether or back towards the genuine intolerant Islam.

Among Christians, the trend towards genuine religious pluralism does exist, but in India it concerns only a microscopic minority. I have heard Swayamsevakas assert that the Christians in South India have become much less hostile, "for they are now giving Hindu first names to their children". But with my inside contacts and my close watch on Christian media and scholarship, I know for fact that this change in fashion does not represent a change of heart. For a first test, how many Christians who have named their children Rama or Sita have supported the Ayodhya temple movement? The historical fact that their ancestors enjoyed the hospitality of the Hindus (as against the persecution by rival Christian sects in the Roman Empire and by the Mazdean state religion in Iran) only makes their animosity against Hindus more bitter; people tend to hate those to whom they owe a debt. Moreover, even if we assume that dilution of Christianity and Islam down to a non-offensive level of commitment is the desirable goal, history testifies that this goal has been reached in Europe through a frontal attack on Christianity itself. It is no coincidence that Christianity has mellowed in the last two centuries just when it was put to scrutiny by scholars and driven from its political and educational power positions by secularists (in the genuine sense).

If you flatter Islam, saying that it is a religion of peace and brotherhood, this will not cure the believers of their self-righteousness; rather, it will make them ask why you aren't becoming a Muslim yourself. But if you expose Islam, saying that it is a deluded belief and intrinsically fanatical, it will make apologists search the Quran for verses dimly alluding to tolerance, it will make them write textbooks mendaciously proclaiming that Islam has always been tolerant and for all their dishonesty, they will thereby implicitly be extolling the virtue of tolerance. This is indeed what we do see happening with apologists like Wahiduddin Khan, Rafiq Zakaria or Asghar Ali Engineer: even a small amount of writing about Islamic fanaticism by Western scholars and journalists (while in those circles too, flattery of Islam is the fashion) has sent them looking for proof that Islam is tolerant. If you are satisfied with mellowing Islam down, you have every reason to join the project of a fundamental and uncompromising criticism of Islamic doctrine and history.

A more or less valid objection is that challenging the truth claims of Islam and Christianity will provoke polemical attacks on Hinduism and (even worse) genuine doubts among Hindus about

their own religion. However, the anti-Hindu polemic is already there, Christian missionaries have been very active at it ever since their arrival, and secularists and Muslims have started their own variety since a few decades; on that count, Hindus already have nothing to lose. But I do admit that a critical look at other religions may feel uncomfortable for Hindus who are not used to critical thought. If Mohammed who heard a voice from heaven was just hallucinating, what shall we say about some of the bhakti saints who dressed up like women to be united with the divine lover Krishna, or who would hang in trees monkey-like to impersonate Hanuman?

Hindu tradition is based on the experience of sages, sane men and women who observed the world and explored consciousness. As the Hindu Renaissance spokesmen were fond of asserting, its basis is scientific. This does not mean that it is related to the latest scientific theories in physics, many of which are bound to be superseded by new theories, nor that the Vedas contain descriptions of modern machines, as imaginative writers have tried to prove.[8] It means that its approach is scientific: the Vedic truths are verifiable, universal and repeatable, not dependent on the views of privileged individuals ("prophets") but apaurusheya, "impersonal".

Hindus should get serious about the Constitutional injunction to "develop the scientific temper", one of the few truly Hindu elements in the secular Constitution. If that means that some of the superstitious deadwood which Hinduism has accumulated over the centuries is doomed to fall by the wayside, so much the better. The scientific outlook is deadly to the core beliefs of Islam and Christianity, but Hindus should welcome it as a somewhat neglected pillar of their own tradition whose time has come once more. It is not impossible that mentally afflicted individuals have been attracted to the religious role, particularly in the exaltation-prone Bhakti movement, and that the talented ones among them have acquired some fame as poets, but this does not affect the mainstream of Sanatana Dharma, which is not dependent on any one individual authority.

Very imperfect individuals can find a meaningful place for themselves in this tradition, but to assess the value of this tradition it must be considered in its entirety, not just the viewpoints of individual poets or gurus. This ought to be an occasion to address one of the most serious problems afflicting contemporary Hinduism: sectarianism. One of the additional reasons why many Hindus including these travelling salesmen of enlightenment whom we get to see in the West do not call themselves Hindu, is that their knowledge horizon does not go beyond the teachings of their own guru. It is high time that the teaching of Hinduism is reoriented to a comprehensive view of the tradition.

Some BJP men argue that it is not the task of a political party to wage an ideological struggle. I wonder what the Communists would say about that. At any rate, the Sangh is a family, a house with many mansions, and it certainly has an appropriate department for this kind of work. Indeed, the VHP now already claims to do just this kind of work, viz. to reconvert Muslim communities which have not lost touch with their Hindu heritage entirely. Some people even within the Sangh are privately expressing doubts about these conversions, doubts which are aggravated by the lack of reliable record-keeping; for all its omnipresence, the Sangh and its affiliates are totally unable to provide facts and figures about conversions into and out of Hinduism.

Apart from the conversion business, facing and speaking the truth about hostile religions is most of all an urgent necessity within Hindu activist circles. The BJP and every Sangh-affiliated organizations has ideological training sessions for its own cadres, and it is there, rather than in face-to-face talks with the minorities, that the servile flattery of Islam and Christianity has to be flushed out first. It is inside the BJP office, with no Muslim or secularist listening, that I heard BJP "ideologues" repeat the worn-out Congress lies about the British being guilty of pitting Islam against Hinduism. The present situation is not -- as secularist media routinely allege -- that Hindus among themselves are facing the truth about these predatory religions, only to flatter them in public out of tactical calculations. The secularists suspect that the BJP's public virtue of professed secularism hides a private vice of communalism, I have noticed many times that this public flattery of Christianity and Islam is very much based on genuine convictions, on eager self-deception. At this point, I am not asking the BJP to speak boldly to the Muslims and the secularists; for now, they will be doing their duty if they stop deceiving their own cadres and voters.

At the same time, the BJP need not postpone a bolder stand longer than necessary. A look at the standard practice among non-Hindus shows that there is nothing insupportable about a politician publicly mocking a religion. In Belgium, it is not uncommon that socialist or liberal politicians openly express their anti-Christian convictions, making jokes about Catholic superstitions, all while sitting in coalition governments with the Christian-Democrats. The Muslims openly express their adherence to Islam, a doctrine which is intrinsically hostile to Hinduism. They openly testify that "there is no God but Allah", meaning that Hindus are all profoundly wrong. So what?

At this point, the BJP spokesman will come out with his trump objection: "But criticizing Islam is dangerous! People have been murdered for doing just that!" This, I cannot deny. One of these murders, that of Arya Samaj writer Pandit Lekh Ram, was the reason for British-imposed legal curbs on the freedom to criticize Islam; after that, some Arya Samaj writers have been prosecuted under these laws, others (most famously Swami Shraddhananda) have been murdered by Muslim militants in the 1920s and 30s, to the applause of the whole Muslim clergy. Ever since, Arya Samaj polemic against Islam has become muted, which proves the efficiency of terrorism. But then, even in today's atmosphere of Hindu sarva-dharma-samabhava and Islamic arrogance, Islam-friendly Hindu activists including BJP men are already being killed by Muslims, without any gain in return. Swami Shraddhananda at least died for something, for the freedom of Hindus to liberate their estranged countrymen by informing them of the truth about Islam; if the BJP abandons that right, its martyrs have died in vain.

Moreover, the general opinion climate can be changed. Naguib Mahfouz has described how in his young days, more than fifty years ago, Islam was seen by the Egyptian middle-class as a relic from the past. People could openly mock Islamic beliefs, there was no question of being punished for that. Since then, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction (after a near-mortal attack on his person in 1994, Mahfouz himself had to go in hiding), but it will swing back. Hindus including BJP men can contribute to this change of climate by defying the Emergency which Islam has clamped on India, and by publicly breaking the taboo on criticism of Islam. It will be shocking to the first speaker to hear himself utter unspeakable things like: "I reject the belief in Quranic revelation", but with time and practice, it will become easier.

It should be kept in mind that ideological confrontation is the best and ultimately the only way to prevent physical confrontation. A few hotheads may initially try to "punish" the questioning of Islamic doctrine, but this is bound to remain a marginal problem. The really frightening prospect is the huge riots and the civil war which history has in store for India if the predatory religions are allowed to grab even more of India's population and territory for themselves. Therefore, they have to be exposed.

Ultimately, the truth is unstoppable. Heliocentrism and other breakthroughs to modern science had their martyrs, such as Giordano Bruno and, in a limited way, Galileo Galilei, but ultimately geocentrism could not hold out against the intrinsic superiority of heliocentrism. Like snow before sunshine, like darkness before dawn, dogmatic beliefs are bound to give way once they are exposed to the light of reason -- and of the Vedic vision.

[1] It is precisely this modest and mature view of truth which underlies Hindu pluralism. As David Frawley has convincingly argued, the central value of Hinduism is not "tolerance" (as interested parties try to make Hindus believe) but truth. Yet, this does not lead to the quasi-monotheistic triumphalism and intolerance which characterizes 19th-century-type positivism (e.g. the ill-informed condemnation of Ayurveda and other traditional forms of medicine by academic medicine), but to a sensitive respect for different levels and expressions of truth.

[2] Of course, they should restore the proper direction of walking around the Kaaba. The Pagan parikrama is made in the direction of the planetary motions, i.e. (in the northern hemisphere) clockwise, but Mohammed reversed it in order to prove his non-Paganism. A side-effect is that in contrast with the Pagans, Muslims point their left hand to the Kaaba, the one which they consider unclean because they wipe their bottoms with it.

[3] Diet specialists advise early spring as the best time for fasting, and this was also the Christian and Pagan-Arab custom (Ramadan/Ramzan was the ninth month in a solilunar year beginning ca. 1 July, roughly coinciding with March), but Mohammed jeopardized this healthy custom by tampering with the calendar, so that the month of fasting can fall in midwinter or summer as well.

[4] It may of course be an occasion to rethink this practice. Anyway, who has the facts and figure about caste discrimination among Hindutva activists in their private lives? Both they and their enemies ought to be interested in these data.

[5] Dr. Somers' books are only available in Dutch, but a summary of his Bible analysis is given in K. Elst: *Psychology of Prophetism* (Voice of India 1992). An English summary of his findings on Mohammed is in preparation.

[6] In his Ten Commandments, Moses already plays this trick by juxtaposing his own innovations (monotheism, aniconic cult, taboo on God's name) with long-established norms (respect for parents, chastity etc.). The Quran too has many passages where belief in Mohammed's message is mentioned in one breath with traditional virtues, as if there were a necessary connection between the two. Naive preachers deduce from such passages that Mohammed had been the first to



propagate these virtues and that the Pagan Arabs were bereft of morality.

[7] Contributed by M.G. Vaidya, Organiser, 2 March 1997. It is significant that, as a close reader of RSS publications since seven years, I have never come across any kind of report listing actual data about gains and losses on the conversion front. Any modern organization going about such a serious and large-scale project (e.g. the Christian missions) sets up fact-finding missions and an information-gathering network so as to know exactly what the challenges are and how the project is faring; not so the saviours of Hinduism, who think they can do without this.

[8] All the same, it is relevant that Vedic seers were pioneers in the sciences of astronomy, mathematics and linguistics, just as some Taoists contributed to physical science and technology, as a consequence of their conviction that these domains of reality were pregnant with a transcendent quality. This is much in contrast with Jesus and Mohammed and their companions, who had nothing to offer to science except incomprehension and persecution.

## 23. Conclusion

In spite of Hinduism's nominal magnitude, the chance that Hinduism gets wiped out by its enemies can no longer be discounted. More than ever, fortunes are spent on the war to destroy Hinduism in favour of Islam or some suitably adapted variety of Christianity or Marxism. The hostile activities of Islamic and Christian agitators and the attempts at Hindu demoralization and loss of Hindu self-respect by the secularists are now compounded by a fast-spreading loss of Hindu memory at the mass level by consumerism and Western pulp media. I have seen with my own eyes how local cultures within European civilization are being as good as wiped out in a few decades by the onslaught of mindless "Americanism", and this loss of cultural roots is a major factor in the current defencelessness of the affected populations vis-à-vis the rising threat of Islam. Hindus would be mistaken to think that this cannot happen to their old civilization; most civilizations at the time of their demise were old and venerable. For Hinduism too, time is running out.

The seriousness of the situation should first of all concern the Hindus themselves. Come to think of it, I have very little personal stake in the political success of Hindu revivalism and the continued existence of Hinduism. Of course, there is an invaluable heritage contained in the Upanishads and other Hindu books; but they are available in Western libraries, we can take from them what we like without needing the help of a living Hindu. It was a comforting idea to know that at least one ancient society had managed to preserve its traditions down to the present, but if that society fails to defend itself and disappears, I am confident that we can find our way without it. If Sanskrit scholarship or yogic expertise dies in India, I am sure some aficionados in the West will keep it alive as a matter of antiquarian hobbyism, somewhat like the thriving clubs for amateurs long-dead Pharaonic lore. It is always deplorable when a dinosaur dies, but we can survive the demise of really-existing Hinduism without serious losses. Whether Hinduism will survive as a living civilization in control of its own territory, or merely as a museum piece, is a vital concern only for the Hindus themselves.

The issue is the survival of the besieged Hindu civilization. The stakes are high, and the question is whether Hindus intend to go for the big one or settle for less. A general rule for this type of situation is that if you aim high and put in an effort commensurate with the calibre of your goal, you may achieve it. Even if you don't achieve it, you may still achieve a number of lesser objectives as a spin-off of your effort. But if you aim low, your enthusiasm and hence your effort will be proportionately limited, so the chance is a priori small that you will achieve anything more than your limited goal. Further, your enemies will try to thwart your little efforts with as much zeal as they would your big efforts, so you may still fail to achieve what you intended to. If the Hindu movement continues to aim for petty gains and peripheral achievements, it will continue to fail in its real task, and even the hoped-for petty successes may continue to elude it.

If the Hindutva politicians and activists want to spare themselves the prospect of going down in history as a bunch of buffoons, who stood by and worked on inconsequential things while their country was taken over by their mortal enemies, they will have to get their act together quickly.

Instead of wasting energy on petty politicking and limited goals such as the reconversion of sacred sites, all eyes should be set on the major goal, which is the liberation of fellow Indians from the predatory religions which have alienated them from their ancestral culture. The goal could in fact be set even higher, so as to include among other things the emancipation of the West-Asians and the liberation of the Kaaba (a temple to Hubal, the Arab Shiva) from Islam; but it will already be good if the self-styled vanguard of Hindu society can save its own people and country.

There is nothing "fundamentalist" or "fascist" about this. The emancipation of fellow Indian from closed creeds is a very humane and responsible project. It could best be summed up in the motto with which the Muslim-born humanist Ibn Warraq opens his book *Why I Am Not a Muslim*: "The best thing we can do for Muslims is to free them from Islam." More concretely, it is the only way to avoid the extremely bloody conflagrations which are sure to break out if the Muslim and Christian agitators smell victory in ever-larger sections of the country. As they smell blood, they will become more openly and more fiercely aggressive and Hindus will not go down without a fight; the subsequent loss of life should not be minimized as just one more of those inevitables in history. The ideologies which pit believer against unbeliever should be neutralized before they can add some more achievements to their ugly record.

As part of this great project, smaller projects such as a Common Civil Code or the restoration of some Hindu sacred sites may be legitimate steps on the way, depending on the circumstances, and even temporary compromises with the hostile forces may be justified in certain cases; but the final goal should be kept uppermost in everyone's mind. In the case of the organized Hindutva movement, there is reason to fear that amid all its campaigns for limited demands it has lost the awareness of the larger challenge. Today, when you question Hindutva leaders and ideologues about their puzzling policy of kowtowing before Mohammed and Nehru, the typical answer is that this is all part of a very very clever strategy which you unfortunately haven't understood yet. Admittedly, victorious strategists have often started out with seemingly self-defeating moves which their underlings didn't understand but which produced the desired results in the long run. Let the Hindutva spokesmen ask themselves if their own clever tricks have this calibre, and whether they are really outwitting their enemies rather than themselves.

# Appendix: A Reply to Kanchan Gupta

On 14 and 15 January 1997, the Observer of Business and Politics published a reply by Kanchan Gupta to my own two-part article, "BJP retreat on Ayodhya", on which the present booklet is based. I do not know what Kanchan Gupta's exact relation with the BJP is; I have met him several times at the BJP office and assume that he is a BJP supporter though not from an RSS background. It deserves mention and praise that the article is polite and to the point, two qualities which are the exception rather than the rule in communalism-related debates in India.

After summarizing my critique, he starts by telling the readers that "Mr. Elst's critique stems from a certain sympathy, if not concern, for the BJP". This is and remains true: I still believe that a BJP Government would be a relatively good thing for India, and it makes me sad to see that a lot of potential in the broader Hindu revivalist movement is wasted because of the ideological confusion in the party which was meant to be its political spearhead.

Coming to my view on the BJP's hesitant and shifting stand on the Ayodhya issue, Mr. Gupta suggests that it is "simplistic" and "based on rather superficial knowledge of actual events and facts". So, for my benefit as well as that of the reader, he recapitulates the history of the Ayodhya affair. He argues that from 1528 (construction of Babri Masjid) until after the opening of the building for general worship of the idols in 1986, "the movement to regain Ram Janmabhoomi from illegal Muslim occupation was nothing more than articulation of Hindu religious aspiration and assertion of pious faith over blind zealotry". It became politicized after the 1986 court verdict due to Muslim and secularist agitations against the full restoration of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple: "It was then that the BJP stepped in and strengthened the movement by converting it into a mass agitation aimed at reasserting the very ethos of Indian nationalism -- hence the appeal to Indians to choose between Babar the invader and Ram the national hero, to choose between a monument to India's subjugation and a temple in honour of Indian nationhood."

I understand from this that Kanchan Gupta fully supports the rhetorical shift from a religious Hindu-Muslim conflict to a conflict between nationalism and anti-national forces. Let me point out that many Christian monuments, some of which have become "national" monuments as well, stand on the destroyed pre-Christian places of worship of the nations concerned. Had Islam prevailed in India, the Babri Masjid would stand as a national monument celebrating the Indian nation's liberation from idolatry. Whether the Babri Masjid was national or anti-national entirely depends on fate's choice between two religions: it is only as long as Hinduism prevails that the Babri Masjid counts as an anti-national monument. Whichever way you turn it, the basic conflict remains one between Hinduism and Islam, and twisting it to make it look like something else serves no good purpose.

Kanchan Gupta has a valid point when he describes how the Muslim leadership had been emboldened by its victory in the Shah Bano dispute, where it had made the Government change the law to overrule a Supreme Court verdict disagreeable to the Islamic orthodoxy. It tried to repeat this feat in the Ayodhya affair: force the Government to overrule the 1986 Court verdict opening the disputed building for Hindu worship. "Perhaps they would have succeeded had not the BJP stepped in and put Ayodhya first on its own and the nation's agenda. Suffice it to say, contrary to what Mr. Elst claims, this was no reluctant decision, but a choice exercised voluntarily because the party was (and remains) alert to Hindu concerns."

A somewhat academic point is whether it is indeed best to have one party as champion of a given cause, rather than to stay aloof from all parties while pressurizing all of them and forcing them to compete for your constituency's support. In this case, it seems to me that at least the Congress Party would have been much more sympathetic to the Hindu position on Ayodhya, and much less tied to the Communist-dominated anti-Hindu front, if the Ayodhya demand had not gotten so identified with the BJP. The then Congress leader, Rajiv Gandhi (unlike the "secular fundamentalists" who claim his legacy, like M.J. Akbar and Mani Shankar Aiyar), was a modern and practical man, and he was definitely ready to allow the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in return for some sop to the Muslim leadership, just to get it over with and move on to more tangible issues. I don't know if the identification of the Ayodhya demand with the BJP could have been avoided (through the RSS, the VHP and its Ayodhya campaign were already linked with the BJP anyway), but serious strategists should analyze all the factors of success and failure including the alternatives which we can discern with the benefit of hindsight.

Now the main point: the BJP was "alert to Hindu concerns" and hence not reluctant to embrace the Ayodhya demand. To corroborate this, Kanchan Gupta quotes from two BJP statements made in 1989, which are in themselves quite unobjectionable (though they contain the term "Hindu sentiments" too many times). He summarizes them as focussing on "cultural nationalism, or Hindutva" and on the fact that "India may be more than Hinduism but it cannot be less". And to top it all, L.K. Advani's excellent statement is quoted: "We represent the commitment that this is our ancient nation, not a nation born in 1947, but a nation which has a hoary past and whose culture is essentially Hindu." Yes, the BJP of 1989 was a great party. There is no doubt that its activists wholeheartedly supported the Ayodhya demand, but it remains uncertain whether the leadership's temporary enthusiasm sprang from something better than opportunism. Of course, the leadership is a fairly large group with different tendencies with different degrees of commitment on Ayodhya and other Hindu issues.

Kanchan Gupta maintains that the BJP is still committed to the construction of the temple. About the demolition, it was "regrettable that the famed discipline of the Sangh Parivar failed to withstand the furor of Hindu disquiet", but there was no regret over "the collapse of the domes". I have no quarrel with that. I can also understand that the BJP has tried to re-widen its focus and profile after the Ayodhya drama, and it is even possible that the issue will be solved in a just way without further political interference. Indeed, after half a century of deliberations, and in spite of perennial political pressures on the judges, the Allahabad High Court might still do justice to the Hindus. After all, the Hindus have a cast-iron case, and the judges do seem sensitive to the historical and juridical facts of

the matter (as I was told by Dr. B.R. Grover and Dr. S.P. Gupta, whose expert testimonies on the old revenue records and on the archaeological evidence have been heard by the said Court).

As a matter of principle, one should not make too much of the Ayodhya controversy. The Hindu position is the right one and the issue is important as a symbol,-- but not more than that. If the party feels it can achieve more important things for Hindu society by keeping Ayodhya in the background for a while, that could be the right decision. But what is the BJP's record in the post-Demolition years?

Mr. Gupta moves on to the evaluation of the 13-day (14-day in his count) BJP Government, the hottest fortnight of 1996. He argues that at least at the level of rhetoric, this was undeniably the most nationalistic and the most unapologetically Hindu Government since 1947: announcing a ban on cow-slaughter, the "liberal" Vajpayee declaring that India is secular not in spite of but because of its Hindu majority, and... well, that's it, these two points. Gupta claims that this bold articulation of cultural nationalism "made the opponents of this philosophy look silly", and that it was the very opposite of "crawling in the dust", which was my description of the BJP leadership's typical attitude vis-à-vis the secularists.

I am not aware of any occasion during that fortnight when the secularists looked silly to an objective observer. They looked mean and wrong-headed, because that is what they are, but their success in closing ranks against the BJP Government and in dictating the terms of public discourse including Vajpayee's speech (which extolled "secularism", very much their term) can hardly be described as silly. The expression "looking silly" reminds me rather of that occasion a few years ago when a member of the national BJP leadership proposed the "Mahatma Gandhi formula" for a compromise on Ayodhya, compromise which amounted to a return of the Muslim-occupied Hindu sites to the Hindus. The reference he made to a particular issue of one of Gandhi's weeklies had not been verified, the said issue turned out not to exist (publication of the paper had been stopped years before the date given), and Gandhi had never proposed such a formula. The BJP had made Ayodhya its number one campaign issue, yet it had not bothered to verify a wild claim which any secularist journalist could debunk at short notice. On a silver platter, the party handed its enemies the chance to dispense with their usual lies and to speak the truth while exposing a Hindutva leader's attempted deceit. Of course, their claim that this incident showed the unscrupled Goebbelsian mentality of the BJP was self-serving hyperbole; what it did show instead was the silly thoughtlessness of the Hindutva leaders, innocents abroad in the real world of politics.

Kanchan Gupta then explains that the BJP Government had not really retreated from its commitment to abrogate Article 370 concerning Kashmir: since it did not have the two-thirds majority needed to amend the Constitution, it was simply unable to fulfil this promise, and admitting this was but a matter of honesty and realism. Of course, I am aware that a BJP majority Government would be unable to realize the distinctive points of its programme (except by persuading others to join it on specific points), and it would already have been a great success if the party had merely stayed in power, just to break the taboo on the very idea of a BJP Government. But Panun Kashmir, the Kashmiri refugee organization, well-placed to evaluate the exact impact of Vajpayee's statements on the Kashmir situation, thought it necessary to rebuke the BJP for its

"betrayal" of the cause of Kashmir's full integration in India. It announced that apparently no political party except the Shiv Sena could be trusted to uphold the rights of the Kashmiri Hindus. I confess that my information on Vajpayee's plans for Kashmir was incomplete; but Gupta need not bother about convincing an outsider like myself, I will automatically believe him when he has convinced the Kashmiri refugees.

Gupta admits that "it remains a fact that the BJP cannot look forward to majority Muslim support", that "it cannot but depend on the Hindu vote for electoral success", and that "to disown this fact would amount to disowning the party's *raison d'être*", but defends Advani's vote of thanks to the Muslim voters, made during the party's national executive meeting in Goa. I had quoted the grumbling of some BJP workers against Advani's thanking the Muslim voters but never the Hindu voters as such, though he owes his political career to the latter. Gupta replies: "The very fact that Mr. Advani 'thanked' Muslims for voting BJP -- never mind that probably one in a thousand Muslim voters stamped the party symbol on the ballot paper -- was indicative of the paradigm shift in Muslim opinion post December 6, 1992. The belligerence that marked the boycott of Republic Day celebrations in 1988 had first given way to disbelief as the disputed structure came crashing down and then to acceptance of majoritarian sentiments at the time of polls. That a Muslim delegation called on the BJP-Shiv Sena Government and sought to work in tandem with the Hindu right signifies a political victory unparalleled in India's post-Mughal history."

Really, I don't object to Advani thanking the Muslim voters, for his making this communal distinction in the electorate merely reflects reality. If Muslims vote for the BJP rather than for anti-national parties, it does amount to a substantial step in the right direction, away from Islamic separatism. But to say that the visit of a Muslim lobby group to the BJP/SS government in Mumbai is a "political victory unparalleled in India's post-Mughal history" is a wild exaggeration. I am sure that the Muslim delegation to the BJP/SS government was quite explicit about its intention to safeguard Muslim interests, not national let alone Hindu interests. Rather than being a spectacular innovation, Muslim kowtows before the existing powers for the sake of safeguarding the Muslim interests is an old tradition; it was tried out with roaring success by the Muslim League for 41 years from the time of its foundation down to the time of Partition.

Gupta's reference to the apparent loss of belligerence among the Muslims since 1993, when the post-Demolition riots died down, calls for an explanation. About the facts themselves there can be no doubt, or in Asghar Ali Engineer's words: "Before the Babri demolition it was said a riot a day takes place in India. But since 1993 this position has drastically changed. (...) Organising riots does not seem to be a paying proposition at least for the present." [1] Gupta seems to be claiming the credit on behalf of his party, but most Hindutva activists I know are united in giving the credit to the Kar Sevaks: it was their simplistic and illiterate action which made clear to the Muslim riot-mongers that there is a limit to Hindu patience.

Let us finally address the truly worrying part of Kanchan Gupta's article, about "this last thing of recommending that the BJP should adopt a new two-point agenda of freeing Hindu temples from Government control and amending Article 30 in order to allow Hindu institutions the same benefits as those controlled by minorities". I am indeed in favour of a refocussing of the communal dispute

to points of legal and constitutional discrimination against the Hindus, such as the Minorities' Commission and the special status of Kashmir, Mizoram and Nagaland. A top priority should be the abolition of the discrimination sanctioned by Article 30, which allows "minorities" to set up and administer their own educational institutions, in their own communal interest but with Government subsidies.

Gupta duly notes that the BJP "has articulated its views on Article 30 in its Manifesto: 'Ensure equality for all and discrimination against none on grounds of religion in matters of education by amending Article 30.'" This could be done by adjusting the Hindu rights upwards or the minorities' rights downwards. My impression so far was that the BJP had in mind the extension to the Hindus of the privileges conceded to the minorities; that is at least what BJP experts like Justice Rama Jois had told me. It is remarkable that the BJP Manifesto is ambiguous about this; this may well be due to the influence of people like Kanchan Gupta. For indeed, and to my surprise, Mr. Gupta's position is this: "The solution, from a particular perspective, lies in adopting a radical approach to the problem, scrapping Article 30 in its entirety, not merely amending it to include in its scope Hindu institutions, for the latter approach could only enlarge the realm of malpractices as are evident in minority-managed institutions."

I had already noted in my own article that a downward equalization, stripping the minorities of their privileges, would cause a revolt among the minorities with international support, a crisis which the present BJP is incapable of handling. It seems that my warning has not impressed him; I must have underestimated the BJP's mettle. Well, I wish the BJP a whole lot of good luck if it wants to cut into the Christian and Muslim positions; it will have to face the pandemonium of their muscle-money-media power.

But the breath-taking surprise in Gupta's position lies elsewhere. Here is a BJP spokesman who considers Hindus incapable of honestly administering their own colleges: if Hindus are given the same rights as Muslims and Christians, this will only lead to more "malpractices". For similar reasons, my own "suggestion that the BJP should campaign for the state's retreat from the management of Hindu temples" is rejected as being "not an acceptable proposition". On the contrary, "the BJP should be in the forefront of the demand for state intervention to facilitate social and religious reform".

Follows a list of laws exclusively affecting the Hindus, which are described as beneficial, to the extent that today, "Hindu women are far better off than Muslim or Christian women" and "Hindu society [is] able to compete successfully in a modern world": Sati Regulation of 1829, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, Age of Consent Bill, Travancore Royal Declaration on all-caste temple entry (in this list the only law imposed by a Hindu state), and the four Acts of Parliament of 1955-56 constituting the Hindu Code. With reference to a court case in which Brahmins had unsuccessfully challenged the appointment of an Ezhava as temple priest, Gupta notes: "Had there not been a Travancore Devaswom Board, an Ezhava would never have made it to Priesthood and the Travancore Royal Declaration of the 1930s on temple entry would have remained a forgotten edict." Therefore, the BJP should continue the line taken by the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission (1960, led by Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer), which opted for "the speedy enactment of



legislation for Government supervision of temples in States where there was no such law"; minor improvements may be made on the model of the law governing the Vaishnodevi shrine in Jammu.

For Gupta, if anything, the BJP should work for the implementation of the second, never-implemented recommendation of the same commission: to extend this form of state control to the places of worship of the minorities. Once more, Kanchan Gupta wants to solve the existing inequality by stripping the minorities of their privileges rather than by extending these to the Hindu majority. I repeat my warning that this would probably cause a communal upheaval which a BJP Government could not handle.[2] But the most remarkable point about Gupta's plea for more state intervention in education and temple management is not its recklessness, but its stark disavowal of everything the RSS Parivar stands for.

One of the beautiful things about the Sangh Parivar is its active belief in civil self-organization rather than state intervention. The BJS opposed the Hindu Code Bill, not because it opposed reform (as Swami Karpatri's Ram Rajya Parishad did), but because it rejected interference by a secular state in internal Hindu affairs. The 1951 BJS Manifesto was unambiguous: "Hindu Code Bill. The party holds that social reform should not come as imposition from above. It should work from within the society. Any far-reaching changes as envisaged in the Hindu Code Bill, therefore, should not be made unless there is a strong popular demand for them and a clear verdict is obtained from the electorate." [3] And now Gupta tells us that Hindu society by itself is incapable of reform, that the RSS project has failed, that it could never have succeeded anyway, and that only coercion by the Nehruvian state could implement the reforms which the RSS pretends to work for. Maybe Gupta is right, but in that case the Sangh Parivar ought to organize a large-scale internal debate about the principles involved.

Finally, Gupta restates the BJP's general commitments: "The party cannot afford to lose its cutting edge, its ideological commitment to uncompromising nationalism, be it cultural or economic -- Hindutva and Swadeshi have to remain the BJP's twin oars with the helmsman (at present Mr. Advani) setting the course towards the re-emergence of India as a modern, re-invigorated nation that can claim justifiable pride in its self-identity and self-reliance. This would mean a continuing campaign on issues like Article 370, Ayodhya, uniform civil code, illegal immigration, social harmony, national security, self-reliance, social reform and cultural re-awakening. (...) Above all, the BJP must prepare for power so that it is able to ensure India's transition from suppressed nationhood to a proud nation aware of its true identity with absolute ease; so that it is able to deliver on its promise of 'good governance', which is not a 'colourless slogan', as Mr. Elst argues, but as the party manifesto says, the sum total of 'the four concepts of Suraksha, Shuchita, Swadeshi and Samrasata'." [4]

In most democratic countries, "good governance" would certainly be a colourless slogan, but Mr. Gupta has a point: in India most parties do not dare to make this totally empty promise because their actual record would make it sound laughable. It reflects well on the BJP that it still dares to mention the very term "good governance", even though its record is not spotless either. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the BJP has eagerly adopted these innocuous secular slogans because the label of "Hindu fundamentalists" etc. became too heavy to bear. While good

governance is certainly a commendable campaign promise, its eloquence lies not only in its own contents but also in what it wants to deflect attention away from.

And that brings us to a final point in Kanchan Gupta's reply: "These are not issues that ensure good 'public relations', something which seems to figure high on Mr. Elst's list of priorities, but these are issues which set apart the BJP from other political parties, giving it an identity which others secretly aspire for but are scared to admit in public." Reference is to my own criticism of the BJP's awfully poor public relations during its Ayodhya campaign. My point was and is precisely that, contrary to Kanchan Gupta's bold claims, the BJP is not bravely insensitive to the abuse it receives from opinion-makers including the secularist establishment and its parrots, the international media. On the contrary, the BJP's political line is determined to a considerable extent by what its enemies say about it. When it comes to those points which give the BJP its distinct identity in India's party landscape, the BJP is not a proud and defiant champion of a radical alternative to the rotten establishment, but a sycophantic beggar trying to curry favour with the same establishment. When articulating its "cultural nationalism", the BJP systematically tries to define this as essentially the same thing as the prevalent secularism minus a few excesses. Even when pretending to formulate an alternative, the BJP is still paying implicit tribute to the Nehruvian system. Even when pretending to undo some of the damage to Hindu temples wrought by Islam, the BJP whitewashes and praises Islam.[5] That the BJP stoops to this "crawling in the dust before its enemies" (I stand by that description, Mr. Gupta) is largely the effect of its fright before a bullying crowd of opinion-makers. The BJP consists of very ordinary people (which is alright, certainly preferable to the spoilt children who make up the secularist establishment) and they don't like being in the dock for decades on end. It is for this reason, the BJP's demonstrable concern about public opinion, that the BJP in its turn has no serious option but to influence public opinion in its own favour.

Public opinion consists of two sections. On the one hand you have the Marxist and "secular fundamentalist" shepherd-dogs whose bullying rhetoric frightens many people into compliance with their anti-Hindu line. On the other, you have the docile herd of fearful conformists and ignorant outsiders. The weight which the former section carries largely depends on the extent to which the latter follows its dictates. In this situation, any serious movement would work overtime to detach the herd from the bullies, the camp-followers from the hard core, for this would substantially alter the ideological power equation determining the political possibilities before the BJP. Call it "public relations" or anything you want, but it is imperative that Hindu activists effectively counter the disinformation which cuts them off from a part of their natural Hindu constituency and of their natural allies in the outside world.

To sum up, I still think that a BJP Government at the centre may be a healthy development for India, and I still believe that the RSS can be an important instrument for the self-renewal of Hindu society. However, they need first of all to think of themselves as just that -- instruments in the service of Hindu civilization. They need to evaluate seriously what ends their policies have actually been serving, and to improve their performance. The next word should come from them, and it should not be just a defensive brief like Kanchan Gupta's newspaper article, but a comprehensive evaluation of their achievements in terms of their goals.

[1] A.A. Engineer: "Communalism and Communal Violence, 1996", Economic and Political Weekly, 15 Feb. 1997, p.323-326. Of course, Engineer forgets to note the murders of Hindutva activists in his rather reassuring survey of communal violence in 1996.

[2] On the other hand, I am aware that history provides many examples of people who surprised everyone with their unexpected courage and skill when provoked by a crisis. Quite possibly, some individuals in a future BJP Government would do likewise and thereby shake the Hindutva movement out of its slumber and confusion.

[3] BJS Party Documents 1951-1972, vol.1, p.57-58.

[4] Suraksha = security, Shuchita = impeccability, Swadeshi = economic self-reliance, Samrasata = solidarity.

[5] E.g., in his post-Demolition speech in the Lok Sabha, A.B. Vajpayee declared that he did "not recognize Aurangzeb as a representative of Islam", meaning that Islam is alright but extraneous forces put Aurangzeb on an un-Islamic course of persecution and temple destruction. The RSS publishing-house Suruchi Prakashan has published his speech in a booklet titled, with unintended irony, Hindus Betrayed.